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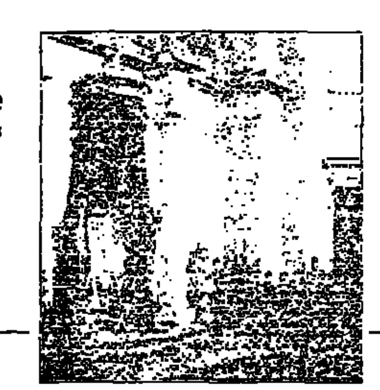
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Housing hope

Two-page special: Parliaments in Egypt 1829-1952

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Peace signing

A PEACE treaty in former Yugoslavia is due to be formally signed today at the Elysée Palace in Paris, in the presence of US President Clinton and leaders from all over the world. The two-day historic event began yesterday with a series of meetings held by senior officials, including Egypt's Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

The accord, initialled in Dayton, in the US on 21 November, calls for the division of Bosnia between a Muslim-Croat federation and the Serbs, with some semblance of a central authority. It further provides that refugees be allowed to return to their homes and free elections be held within the next nine months.

The Paris conference will pave the way for a 60,000-strong peacekeeping force to enter Bosnia. US troops, forming a third of the force, were expected to be given the final approval for their participation by Congress within hours. The 16 NATO countries along with 12 other nations, including Russia, will contribute to the task force.

Meanwhile, Serbs in the nine Sarajevo districts they control, have voted overwhelmingly, in a Serb-held referendum, in favour of a divided city. The vote will not change Sarajevo's status under the Paris accord as the undivided capital of Bosnia.

Murder taped

THE STATE commission of inquiry into the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin yesterday barred the screening of a video film showing the murder. The film was shot by an amateur cameraman from the roof of a shopping centre next to the Tel Aviv square where Rabin was gunned down on 4 November. A spokesman for the commission admitted that the tape had been handed to the commission a month ago, after the press leaked the news of the existence of the only known documentation of the killing. He cited sparing Rabin's family more grief as an explanation for prohibiting the film's showing.

But political commentators said the very existence of the tape was a further embarrassment to the security services, since ballistics experts had claimed the photographer's presence on the nearby rooftop showed that someone armed with a rifle and telescopic sight also could have shot Rabin with relative ease. The commission has asked the public prosecutor's office to decide if the film should be submitted as evidence at the trial of Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir.

Pakistani call

PAKISTANI Foreign Minister Serdar Asef Ahmed arrives in Cairo on Friday on a three-day visit to head his country's delegation to the first meeting of the joint Egyptian-Pakistani Ministerial Committee, due to open on Saturday.

The Pakistani delegation includes 12 top officials from the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Culture, the Interior, Industry and Trade, as well as businessmen. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa will head Egypt's delegation and the two countries are due to sign four agreements in the fields of culture, education, tourism and taxes.

INSIDE

Momentum mounts

Syria welcomed Premier Shimon Peres' peace initiative but stuck to its demand for full Israeli troop withdrawal from the Golan

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said yesterday it may take US Secretary of State Warren Christopher more than one shuttle trip to the Middle East to pull off a resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations.

Interviewed by Israel television in Washington, Peres nodded when asked if Christopher, who begins a fresh Middle East tour today, may have to return to the region to revive the negotiations.

"It won't be in one jump. It will take more," the Israeli leader said at the end of his first visit to the US capital since Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in November.

Christopher will arrive in Damascus tonight, before travelling to Israel, hoping to get the two antagonists to renew negotiations begun in 1991, and last held six months ago.

The talks are stuck over the depth of an Israeli pullout from the Golan Heights, captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war, security arrangements and the terms of peace.

A senior Syrian official was quoted by Reuters as saying in Damascus that Peres' peace proposals were welcome but that Israel must say it is willing to withdraw entirely from the Golan Heights.

Damascus newspapers said Peres' appeal for peace had increased the chances of a settlement between the two Middle East foes. In front page editorials, the *Tishrin* and *Al-Baath* dailies presented rare upbeat evaluations of Peres' public remarks during his official trip to Washington.

Tishrin described as "positive and worthy of attention" the Israeli leader's speech Tuesday at a joint session of the US Congress. *Al-Baath* said it "rekindled hopes" for reviving the stalled negotiations.

"I stand before you with one overriding commitment: to yield to no threat, to stop at no obstacle in negotiating the hurdles ahead in seeking security for our people, peace for our land, tranquility for our region," Peres told Congress.

Directing his words to Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad, he said: "We shall stand ready to make demanding decisions if you are."

Peres, however, stopped short of meeting Assad's demand for an Israeli commitment to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

At a news conference in Washington later, the Israeli leader said that "the time has not come for me to announce it," a remark that suggested he might meet the Syrian demand at a later stage.

"Such positive statements mean that the Israeli prime minister has proceeded in the right direction to move the Syrian peace track forward and to meet the requirements of a just and comprehensive peace in the region," said *Tishrin*, which is known to reflect government thinking. As a result, it added, "the chances of achieving a just and lasting peace are increasing."

Al-Baath, mouthpiece of Assad's ruling Arab Baath Socialist Party, said the outcome of Peres' talks with US President Bill Clinton at the White House on Monday "rekindled hopes for realising a just and comprehensive peace in the region."

President Clinton has said he spoke to Assad by telephone after the meeting.

The Syrian-Israeli talks collapsed in June after the two sides failed to resolve differences over security arrangements in the event of an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.

Israel demanded ground-based surveillance outposts after the anticipated withdrawal. Syria adamantly refused, saying such an arrangement would infringe on its sovereignty. Instead, Damascus suggested an aerial monitoring system.

Israel's *Jerusalem Post* newspaper, quoting senior officials in the US administration, said Christopher would offer Syria four negotiating formats, including a summit of the style used to forge peace between Egypt and Israel at Camp David in 1978.

Another Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, said Israel is willing to pull its troops from southern Lebanon if Syria guarantees security along the Israel-Lebanon border in an initial step towards a fuller peace agreement. The newspaper quoted an Israeli official as saying Peres told Clinton of his willingness to reach an "interim agreement" with Syria on Lebanon.

Under the agreement, Israel would "recognise de facto the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon and withdraw its own troops in exchange for a commitment by Damascus to guarantee the security and stability of the Israel-Lebanon border," the official was quoted as having said.

But in Lebanon, officials questioned Peres' sincerity. President Elias Hrawi said Lebanon would not return to negotiations before Israel provides a timetable for withdrawing from south Lebanon, the last active Middle East war front.

"Lebanon and Syria want details. We want issues to be clear. The trouble has always been in the details," Hrawi said.

PNA-Hamas talks

AFTER 17 stormy months, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Hamas will meet for reconciliation talks in Egypt on Saturday, reports **Tarek Hassan** from Gaza. As a prelude, eight top Hamas leaders from the West Bank and Gaza Strip are due to meet their exiled counterparts in Khartoum today to hammer out a possible compromise deal with the authority.

The weekend meeting will take place somewhere in Egypt where several long and arduous sessions will be convened behind closed doors, away from the mass media. The Hamas delegation will include 11 members: four from the West Bank; four from Gaza; and three Hamas leaders from abroad. According to Salim Al-Zanoun, who will be heading the PNA four-man delegation, "Arafat will participate towards the end of the dialogue."

The main concern of the talks, said Zanoun, will be "to try and agree on a strategy to govern the relationship between the two parties." He added that "Hamas will be urged to participate in the coming Palestinian elections." Moreover, if the dialogue bears fruit and Hamas accepts participation in the elections, Zanoun said that Fatah would be willing to "consider forming joint electoral lists." There is a clear decision on the part of Fatah, declared Zanoun, not to monopolise the elections.

Hamas spokesman, Mahmoud Zahar, said shortly before leaving Gaza on his way to Khartoum that "We very much want to reach an agreement with the PNA" and that the participation of Hamas in January's elections will be among the items of the agenda. But, careful not to prematurely commit himself, Zahar emphasised that "the present position of Hamas is not to participate in the elections."

Zahar added that the talks will also include the question of handing in Hamas weapons to the PNA. This is one of the most thorny issues of the dialogue, as it is linked to a demand by the PNA that Hamas halts military operations launched from the self-rule areas against Israeli targets, and the authority's assertion that the PNA should be the sole authority in charge of security inside these areas.

For its part, Hamas wants the carrying of arms to be regulated rather than banned. Hamas says that many of the cadres in its military wing are being hunted by the Israelis and subjected to physical liquidation which necessitates them keeping their weapons. The PNA has, however, stuck to its guns, offering instead to provide special protection for those individuals whom Hamas names as being in possible danger.

The demilitarisation of Palestinian political life will be another major area of contention. Hamas has rejected PNA overtures to confine its activities to those of a political party with social and cultural dimensions. Recently some Hamas members established a new political party, the National Islamic Salvation Party (NISP).

However, the leadership of Hamas says that this party does not represent the movement and rejects the statements of NISP leaders that their party is one of the wings of the movement. Hamas also dismissed Imad Al-Falouji, editor of its official weekly newspaper, this week "for failing to follow instructions". Falouji had announced that he would run as an islamic independent candidate in the elections and had been named by President Arafat to lead the "national dialogue" with those opposed to the PLO-Israel peace deal.

On the other hand, the PNA has been endeavouring to insure the participation of the NISP in the elections, viewing it as a possible replacement for Hamas. This is one reason for the announcement earlier this week that candidacy application procedures will remain open until 22 December. The PNA is hoping that the NISP will pledge itself to participate following Saturday's meetings in Egypt.





photos: Abdel-Wahab El-... and Sherif Sonbol

Waste not, want not: Debris from the elections continues to litter the streets of towns and villages alike. After weeks of sound and fury, loudspeakers, now silent, make trophies of sorts while children return to schools that had served as polling stations. And what to do with all those banners, strung between every available lamp post? Well, they make perfect car covers, no matter what your political allegiance

Fraud claims rejected

As the new People's Assembly met in a procedural session, a highly-placed Interior Ministry official, speaking to ***Jailan Halawi****, rejected opposition charges of election fraud*

The new People's Assembly met for the first time in a procedural session yesterday and re-elected Dr Ahmed Fathi Sorour as Speaker by a sweeping majority of 436 votes out of 438 cast.

Ahmed Hamadi and El-Sayed Rashed were also re-elected as deputy speakers, winning 415 and 381 votes respectively. Independent Ahmed Taha nominated himself for the deputy speaker's post but garnered only 34 votes.

The Assembly later sent a cable to President Hosni Mubarak, pledging to "truly represent the free will of the people". The house expressed esteem for Mubarak's "determination to promote democracy, freedom and the supremacy of law", and described the parliamentary elections as a "historic testimonial to the president's unrelenting support for democracy".

Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. Mohamed Bedeir El-Menshawi, chief of the Interior Ministry's elections department, defended the performance of the security forces during the elections, although he conceded there had been some irregularities.

In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Menshawi denied opposition charges that some voters were turned back by police stationed outside polling stations. "We cannot and did not prevent anyone from exercising his right to vote," Menshawi said. "Our task was to secure the polling stations and not to promote a certain candidate at the expense of another."

Menshawi also rejected opposition charges that some ballot boxes were fraudulently stuffed with votes for candidates of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). "This could never happen," he asserted, "but assuming that it did, why didn't those candidates report the matter to the chief of the polling station, the nearest police station or even the district prosecutor?"

But Menshawi conceded that some candidates had stormed polling stations and rigged the vote. "I cannot deny that this took place at some stations, but our orders were to secure the stations from the outside... Police can intervene inside only at the request of the head of the station."

Menshawi also acknowledged that "a limited number of violations" had been committed by the security forces.

"Assume that we were around 40,000 or 50,000 men. Is it logical that not one of us would commit an irregularity?" he asked. A small number of officers were currently being questioned, he said, and would be suspended, or even dismissed, if found guilty of violating the law.

Menshawi insisted that the police forces, and not the law breakers, had the upper hand in the two rounds of elections. "But in the first round, there was a large number of constituencies, and violence had not been expected in some of them," he said. The outbreak of violence in those constituencies alerted the police to the need to strengthen their presence during the next round. "As a result," he continued, "our presence prevented dramatic events from assuming even more serious proportions in the second round".

Crushing Jihad's plot

A terrorist scheme targeting public figures and buildings was thwarted by security authorities

Security forces have foiled a terrorist scheme by the underground Jihad organisation to bomb public buildings in Greater Cairo and assassinate high officials, planned to coincide with the recent parliamentary elections, a highly-placed Interior Ministry official said. Two terrorists were killed in separate shootouts with police along the Alexandria-Marsa Matrouh and the Ismailia-Port Said highways. Fifty-six others were arrested. Five Sudanese nationals, who had arranged the terrorists' infiltration across Egypt's southern border, were also rounded up. Large numbers of weapons, including four automatic rifles and nine pistols were seized, and a workshop for the manufacture of explosives uncovered, in the group's hideouts in four governorates — Giza, Alexandria, Ismailia and Aswan. Sizeable sums of money were also confiscated — LE50,000, 25,000 pounds sterling and $3,000.

The official said state security agents had monitored the plans of Jihad members in London to carry out acts of terrorism in Egypt. London-based militants had conspired with Jihad members in Sudan and some other countries to dispatch militarily-trained terrorists, including suicide bombers, to launch subversive activities in this country. At the same time, the official said, they commissioned "armed Sudanese elements" to arrange the infiltration of these terrorists across the Egyptian border from Sudan.

Once in Egypt, the terrorists established contact with local accomplices, kept the homes of several political, administrative, military and police figures, as well as some writers and journalists, under close surveillance, also monitoring the daily movements of the people concerned.

But security forces acted quickly to thwart their plans. In synchronised attacks, the hideouts of the terrorists in the four governorates were raided and 56 of them were arrested.

Mahmoud El-Sayed Shaaban, described as a leading member of Jihad who had received training in Afghanistan and been commissioned to carry out suicide bombing attacks, opened fire at police as they raided his hideout in a quarry along the Alexandria-Marsa Matrouh highway. Police fired back, fatally wounding him.

Another terrorist, Nabil Abdel-Rahman Rizk, opened fire at security forces to cover his escape from a hideout along the Ismailia-Port Said road. He was killed in the ensuing gun battle.

A third terrorist, Akram Abdel-Aziz El-Sherif, who worked as a driver in Britain and was said to have acquired British nationality after marrying a British woman, was arrested.

Five Sudanese nationals and two other Egyptians were also apprehended for arranging the infiltration of the terrorists from Sudan.



Turning over a new leaf

In the first meeting with his party's members of parliament, President Mubarak discussed a number of issues of concern. **Nevine Khalil** attended

In his capacity as chairman of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), President Hosni Mubarak met with his party's members of parliament for more than two hours on Tuesday. Mubarak asserted that press reports of a US request to investigate alleged election irregularities were unfounded. "Neither the US, nor any other country, has approached me on this subject," Mubarak said. "Egypt is a sovereign state, and its people would never accept any form of guardianship or supervision by foreigners."

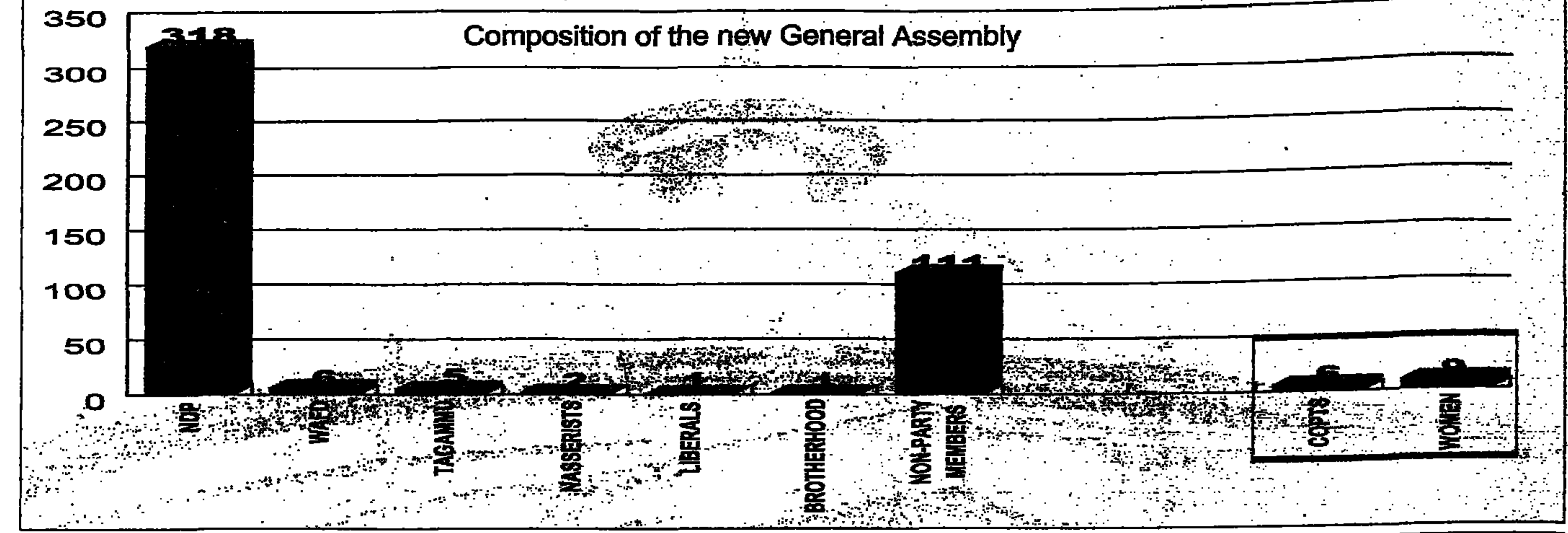
Mubarak continued that Egypt had "come of age" politically a long time ago, and is "a nation with a heritage".

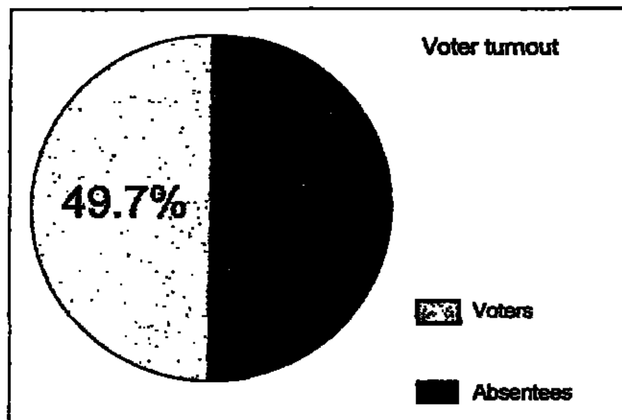
Commenting on the violent incidents which occurred during the elections, Mubarak said that violence "is characteristic of competition". He conceded that the recent elections had witnessed some distressing incidents, perpetrated by all participants, not just supporters of his party. "Those who failed to achieve their goals turned to violence," he said. "But now we should turn over a new leaf and work for the benefit of the electorate." The president accused some party newspapers of provoking this upsurge of violence.

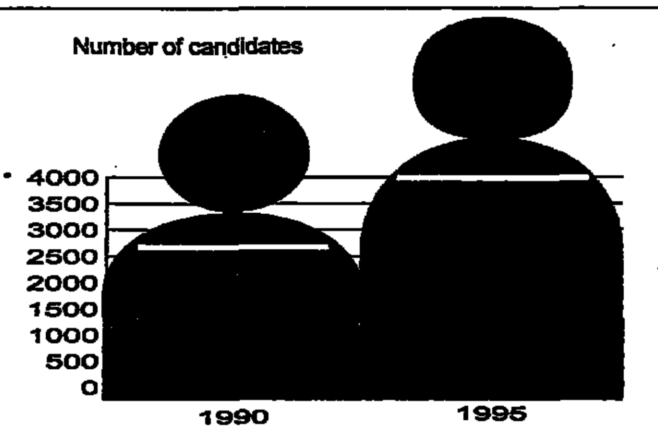
Mubarak criticised the way some parties conducted themselves, saying that "using offensive language is not a means of discussion between parties". He had wanted to see more opposition figures in the new parliament. "I was very sorry that some of them lost," he said, "but even more sorry that after losing they cried foul".

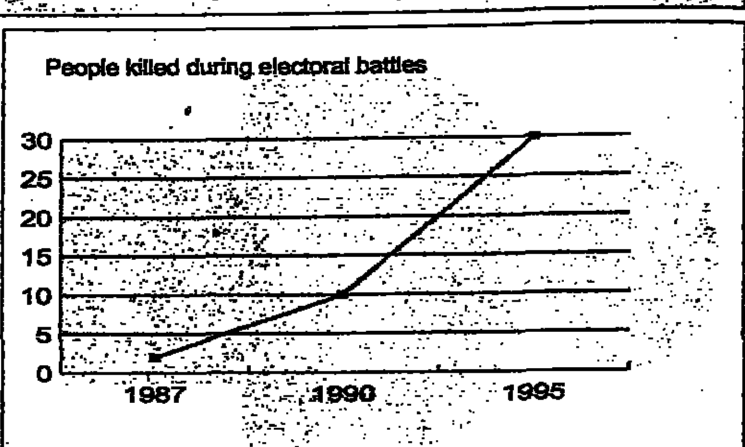
Asked about Egyptian terrorists' roots in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sudan, the president said that the current Pakistani regime, unlike previous governments, "is confronting the phenomenon with full force". Mubarak continued that, true to his previous warnings, countries which have stood on the sidelines regarding the issue of terrorism have suffered. "Terrorism is a dangerous ailment to afflict a country," he said, adding that "there is now a united international stand on combating terrorism". He emphasised the difference between Algerian and Egyptian terrorism, saying that the nature of the phenomenon in the two countries was completely different.

On the subject of the economy, Mubarak named increasing population growth as the greatest hinderance to achieving the aspired to 8 per cent development rate. "If the status quo continues, the results will be ominous," the president said. "It will affect the future of Egypt and its future generations, accumulating problems and wasting development efforts."









Landslide victory

The People's Assembly elections resulted in a sweeping victory for the NDP, while opposition parties barely managed to get a foothold in the house. **Gamal Essam El-Din** writes

As political analysts anticipated, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) emerged triumphant from the two rounds of parliamentary elections held on 29 November and 6 December. The surprise, however, was the scope of the NDP victory and the poor performance of opposition parties, which they blamed on electoral fraud.

The NDP won 318, about 71 per cent, of the Assembly's 444 contested seats. Only 15 seats, about 3 per cent, went to opposition parties and the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. The remaining seats were won by independents.

In the official breakdown, the NDP won 138 seats in the first round and 180 in the second. But the number of its parliamentary deputies is anticipated to swell to 417 because 99 independents are expected to join the ruling party's ranks after they won. Most of them were either NDP members or former members who were not nominated by the party in the election battle.

Although Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif said on Tuesday the 99 had not all been accepted to the party's fold, political analysts said this appeared to be a foregone conclusion.

The Wafd Party are the largest opposition party, with six seats, which went to Yassin Serageddin, Ahmed Abu Ismail, Fouad Badrawi, Ayman Nour, Ahmed Nasser and Omar Barakat.

The leftist Tagammu won five seats, with its chairman, Khaled Mohieddin, as well as El-Badri Farghali, Raafat Seif, Mohamed Abdel-Aziz Shaaban and Mohamed El-Dohiri elected to the Assembly.

The Nasserist Democratic Party's Sameh Ashour and Mahmoud Zeinhom won the party's two seats, and the Liberal Party won one seat, which went to Ragab Hilal Hemeida. A lone candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood, Ali Sayed Fat'h El-Bab, managed to make it to the house.

In announcing the results last Thursday, Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi praised what he described as "the wonderful exercise of democracy, which demonstrated that the people uphold their constitutional rights". The large number of candidates, nearly 4,000, and the heavy turnout of voters, officially set at 49.7 per cent of about 20 million registered voters, "had to produce both negative and positive results".

The negative phenomena, El-Alfi said, were the outcome of conflicting loyalties as well as the "emotional actions of some candidates and their supporters who had not grasped the meaning of democracy and the discipline it requires". El-Alfi conceded that some security men had committed irregularities "which were decisively dealt with".

On the positive side, El-Alfi said the elections had produced a parliament "that truly represents the will of the people". The elections showed that Egyptians were no longer attracted by slogans but wanted "sincere political and national action. As an Egyptian citizen, I believe the elections marked the triumph of democracy, which is bound to grow and flourish."

The NDP winners included two cabinet ministers — Minister of Supply Ahmed Gweili, who was elected to the house for the first time, and veteran MP Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments).

Some other prominent NDP personalities, who chaired sub-committees of the outgoing Assembly, managed to retain their seats; others lost.

The winners included Abdel-Rehim El-Ghoul, ex-chairman of the youth committee, Salah El-Tarouti, ex-chairman of the culture, tourism and information committee, Ahmed Fouad Abdel-Aziz, ex-chairman of the education committee, Mohamed Tolba Eweida, ex-chairman of the Arab affairs committee, Mustafa El-Said, ex-chairman of the economic committee, and Tawfik Abdou Ismail, ex-chairman of the budget and planning committee.

The speaker of the outgoing Assembly, Fathi Sorour, as well as his two deputies, El-Sayed Rashed and Ahmed Hammadi, also won. All three were nominated by the NDP bureau to retain their seats in the new house.

NDP losers included Saad El-Sherbini, ex-chairman of the local administration committee, Hussein El-Serafi, ex-chairman of the health and environment committee, Widad Shalabi, ex-deputy chairman of the transport committee, Abdel-El Khalifa, ex-deputy chairman of the industry committee, and Mohamed Khalil Hafez who, despite his NDP affiliation, lashed out at government policies in the outgoing Assembly.

Opposition losers were led by Ibrahim Shukri, chairman of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, who failed in the first round in his home town, Sherbin, (Daqahliyia) and Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Nasserist Democratic Party, who failed in the re-runs in Fareskour, in the north of the Nile Delta.

Losers from the Wafd Party included No'man Gomaa, the party's deputy chairman in Imbaba (Giza), Mounir Fakhri Abdel-Nour in Al-Waili (Cairo), Ali Salama, in Hawamdiyeh (Giza), Mahmoud El-Saqqa in Al-Khalifa (Cairo) and Fahmi Abu-Hashish in Port Said.

Abul-Ezz El-Hariri from the Tagammu Party also failed in Alexandria, while the Liberal Party's Mustafa Bakri withdrew at the last minute from the election race against Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf*, in the Cairo constituency of Helwan-Tibbeen.

With one exception, the candidates of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood were all defeated. They included Moukhtar Nouh in Matariya (Cairo), Abdel-Hamid El-Ghazali in Manial (Cairo), Shukri Shaltout in Dekerness (Daqahliya), Mohamed Ali Beshr in Shebin Al-Kom (Menoufiya), and Adel Eid in Bab Sharqi (Alexandria).

Several independents who had put up a strong opposition to the government in the outgoing Assembly also lost. They included Farouq Metwalli in Suez City, Mohamed El-Badrashini in Alexandria, Ibrahim Ibada in Sharqiya and Ibrahim Awara in Tanta.

Five women, all NDP members, won seats: Amal Osman, minister of social affairs, in Dokki (Giza), Fayda Kamel in Al-Khalifa (Cairo), Sawsan Kilani in Ismailia, Galila Awad in southern Sinai and Soraya Labena in Nasr City (Cairo).

Several businessmen also made it to the house, such as the NDP's Mahmoud Azzam in Al-Saff (Giza), and the NDP's Mamdouh Thabet Mekki in Manial (Cairo) and Alaa Diab in Abu Hommos (Beheira).

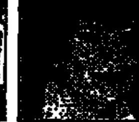
Addressing a number of old and new Assembly members, Sorour said the mixture of old and new faces will give the Assembly a new vitality to help it reflect the people's aspirations.

Tagammu's El-Badri Farghali said his first task in the new Assembly will be to direct an interpellation — a question which a cabinet minister must answer — to Mahmoud El-Sherif, minister of local administration, on the alleged use of social service funds to back NDP candidates in their election campaigns.

Reserved seats


Loza


Hashem

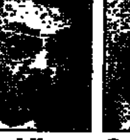

El-Tatawi


Samaan


El-Dahabi

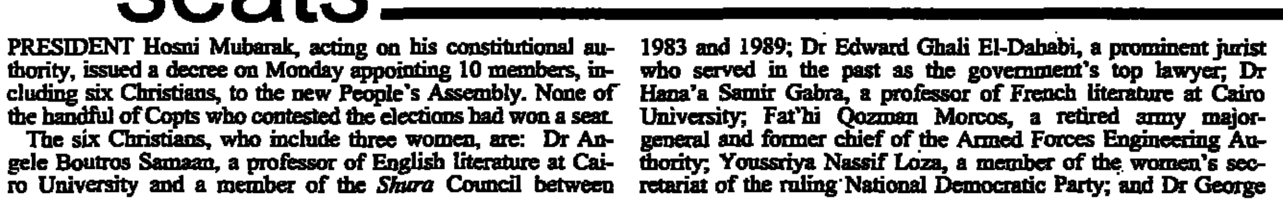

Ezzeddin


Qozman


Abul-Enein







PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak, acting on his constitutional authority, issued a decree on Monday appointing 10 members, including six Christians, to the new People's Assembly. None of the handful of Copts who contested the elections had won a seat.

The six Christians, who include three women, are: Dr Angele Boutros Samaan, a professor of English literature at Cairo University and a member of the *Shura* Council between 1983 and 1989; Dr Edward Ghali El-Dahabi, a prominent jurist who served in the past as the government's top lawyer; Dr Hana'a Samir Gabra, a professor of French literature at Cairo University; Fat'hi Qozman Morcos, a retired army major-general and former chief of the Armed Forces Engineering Authority; Youssriya Nassif Loza, a member of the women's secretariat of the ruling National Democratic Party; and Dr George Philip Azer, a retired professor of geology.

The remaining four appointees are: Dr Ahmed Omar Hashem, president of Al-Azhar University; Mohamed Abul-Enein, a businessman and a board member of the Investment Authority; Ahmed Galal Ezzeddin, a retired police major-general and anti-terrorism expert; and Dr Nawal Abdel-Moneim El-Tatawi, chairwoman of the Arab Investment Bank.

Representing women

The handful of women elected to the new People's Assembly believe that women need better representation in parliament. **Nermeen El-Nawawi** reports

Five women, all veteran parliamentarians and candidates of the ruling National Democratic Party, were elected to the new People's Assembly. They are Soraya Labena, Sawsan El-Kilani, Fayda Kamel, Amal Osman and Galeela Awwad. Four others were appointed by President Hosni Mubarak.

While the women were not happy with their limited level of representation, they remained unconvinced that reserving a certain number of seats for women would be a positive step.

"There are not enough women MPs," said Labena, an under-secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum, who won the workers' seat in the Cairo constituency of Nasr City.

Labena, who has been an MP since 1984, explained that a constitutional amendment would be necessary to reserve parliamentary seats for women. "But this is not necessary," she asserted, "because it is better for women to compete with men and get elected on merit".

El-Kilani, who has represented the Suez Canal city of Ismailia since 1979, expressed similar views. "Women deputies are as strong as men and sometimes fight even more aggressively," she said. However, she added, there were "certain factors, such as the large number of candidates and the influence of money, which certainly reduced women's chances". El-Kilani, nevertheless, agreed with Labena in opposing the allocation of seats for women.

Kamel, who has represented the Cairo constituency of Al-Khalifa for the past 24 years, cited the use of violence in the election battle as the biggest obstacle facing women candidates. "Candidates and their supporters now resort to violence," she said. "A woman candidate cannot compete unless she has very strong support amongst her constituents."

Social Affairs Minister Amal Osman won a seat in the Giza constituency of Dokki, defeating Maamoun El-Hodeibi, spokesman for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. Awwad was elected in the southern Sinai constituency of Ras Sudr.

The five elected women will bring similar agendas to the Assembly. Labena's interests are mainly in the field of social services: improving conditions for the poor and those who have reached retirement age, and upgrading health care and health insurance services.

El-Kilani, who assisted in the mass evacuation of the residents of Ismailia following the 1967 war, advocates improving the school children's health insurance programme. "In some schools, doctors are not available, medical equipment is lacking and prescribed medicines are too expensive," she complained. Poor children, she added, should be exempted from the payment of health insurance fees. El-Kilani also pledged to fight unemployment in her constituency by launching small projects for young people east of the Suez Canal.

Kamel supports widening the scope of the children's health care programme. She has also undertaken to fight for a reduction in the high university fees paid by children of a foreign father and an Egyptian mother.

Meanwhile, Awwad said she would work to establish more schools, clinics and roads in her area and to promote tourism in Sinai.

Social Affairs Minister Osman's priority will be the alleviation of poverty in lower-income groups. She pledged that services provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs, as well as non-governmental organisations, would be improved.

Challenging the results

Defeated candidates are challenging the results in their constituencies in the administrative courts, reports **Shaden Shehab**

Administrative courts in Cairo and other governorates are considering some 114 complaints filed by losing candidates who sought to have their election results annulled because of alleged fraud. The Supreme Administrative Court is expected to announce its decision in about 100 cases on Monday, while 14 other challenges are being considered by lower courts.

On the eve of the 6 December election runoffs, administrative courts ruled that the results of the first round in more than 50 constituencies were null and void. But the government went ahead with the second round, after filing appeals with the Supreme Administrative Court. In the following days, the number of cases had swelled to more than 100.

As the litigation continued, opinions were divided as to whether the administrative courts had the jurisdiction to consider the complaints. The "state commissioners' authority", an advisory body to the administrative courts, opined that the complaints fell outside the courts' mandate. The only authority which can rule on the legality of a deputy's membership of parliament is parliament itself, the state commissioners' authority said.

Fawzia Abdel-Sattar, former chairperson of parliament's legislative committee, agreed, predicting that the Supreme Administrative Court will rule that it does not have the jurisdiction to consider the complaints "because this is the business of parliament itself".

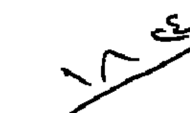
Even if the Supreme Court declared the results of the disputed constituencies invalid, its decision cannot strip a parliamentary deputy of his Assembly membership, she said. The second round runoffs were perfectly legal, she added, because the government had filed appeals with the Supreme Administrative Court, which meant that the orders of the lower courts should not be implemented.

But Kamal Abul-Magd, another legal expert, said that if the Supreme Court ordered the cancellation of those election results, "then the government should respect the court order and enforce it". If the government refuses to do so, the only thing left for a defeated candidate who won a court order in his favour is to file a lawsuit with an administrative court, demanding financial compensation, Abul-Magd said. In past cases, the court has ordered the government to pay candidates as much as LE100,000 in compensation.

Abul-Magd conceded, however, that it was possible to make a legal argument that the Assembly alone had the authority to rule on the validity of a deputy's membership. In this case, litigants should file their complaints to parliament, which will forward them to the Court of Cassation for investigation.

The Constitution "makes it the responsibility of the Court of Cassation to ascertain the legality of a deputy's membership of parliament," agreed Abdel-Sattar. Candidates who wish to challenge election results have to do so by submitting a report to parliament explaining the reasons for their challenge within 15 days of the announcement of the results.

The court will investigate the case and send a report to parliament on its findings within a 90-day period, she said. This report will be put to a vote; a two-thirds majority is needed to drop the membership of any deputy.



Strong control over government

Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs and the NDP's assistant secretary-general, argues that the NDP's overwhelming majority in the People's Assembly will not weaken its control over government actions. He spoke to **Gamal Essam El-Din**

Some analysts argue that the overwhelming NDP majority in the People's Assembly, and the weakness of the opposition, will impair the Assembly's control over government activities. How do you respond?

The control exercised by the People's Assembly over the government's performance is regulated by the constitution, the law and the Assembly's statutes, as well as parliamentary tradition which has become established as part and parcel of the Assembly's method of action. For example, deputies are empowered to direct questions, requests for information and interpellations [to cabinet ministers] in order to ascertain the facts of a situation and bring ministers to account, if necessary. Moreover, draft laws and international agreements are referred by the government for careful scrutiny by the Assembly's specialised committees. Whenever necessary, fact-finding committees are established. The Assembly also has the responsibility of debating the government's annual policy statement and preparing a comprehensive report on it.

All these are methods of exercising control over the performance of the executive authority. All Assembly members, whether they belong to the majority or the opposition, are empowered to use these methods, which are sanctioned by the constitution, the law and the rules of the house.

In all democratic states, the majority party forms the government. That government is committed to carrying out the party's platform and is backed by its party members in parliament in doing so.

The claim that a big majority weakens parliamentary control has no basis in reality. The proof is that in previous parliaments, also with large majorities, many draft laws were modified by Assembly members, and cabinet ministers responded to many questions and requests for information submitted by deputies.

Why didn't the government accept international, or even local, observers to monitor the elections in order to ward off opposition charges of fraud?

Elections are an act of sovereignty. In other words, they are an internal event regulated by the constitution and the laws of the state where they are taking place. The presence of observers at elections in Algeria, some other African states and some member-states of the former Soviet Union, was at the request of those states themselves.

But in Egypt, we have constitutional and legislative stability, a free press and freedom of expression. There are no restrictions on publishing or movement or personal freedoms. Consequently, we consider any kind of observation, outside the framework of the constitution and the law, a violation of the sanctity of our citizens' rights and an attempt to exercise guardianship over the people of Egypt, who have acquired the necessary awareness and maturity to be able to distinguish for themselves between what is good and what is bad. The mere idea of having observers [at the elections] would be a violation of the constitutional and legal traditions that are enshrined in the souls of our people and which guide their thoughts and actions.

Many candidates, who stood as independents while nevertheless sympathising with the NDP, rushed to join or rejoin the majority party after winning seats in the new house. Isn't this action in violation of party commitments?

In my view, the large number of independents is a negative phenomenon in a country which has as many as 13 political parties, whose platforms range widely enough to cover the hopes and aspirations of all those who are interested in political, social, cultural or economic action. The NDP's platform, in particular, is comprehensive enough to cover all the elements of the political spectrum. Consequently, those who 'belong' to the party, not only by means of active membership but also by supporting the party's aims and believing in the party's performance, constitute almost the entire population of Egypt. So it's not surprising that there was an unprecedented number of candidates, averaging 10 for each seat. In announcing their candidature, the sweeping majority of independents affirmed their faith in the NDP's platform and their affiliation to the party, but it was not possible for the party to nominate all of them. Those who won have stuck to their principles, which are the principles of the NDP, and chose not to renounce their party membership. Nevertheless, the party has taken action against some leaders who violated their party commitments.

Do you believe that the presence of several businessmen in the new Assembly is likely to affect the interests of workers and peasants?



The presence of businessmen, industrialists and other entrepreneurs in the Assembly will give an important section of society the opportunity to express itself. The person who owns a factory or a shop, and the people who work in that factory or shop are interdependent — each needs the other. On a wider scale, there can be no industry without a factory owner and factory workers, and there can be no agriculture without a landlord and hired labour. All are cooperating, whether by contributing their money, effort or expertise in the production of a commodity or the provision of a service. There is no conflict of interests; in fact there is a consensus of interests.

Understanding political violence

Sociologists told **Jailan Halawi** that the unprecedented violence that marred the elections was the outcome of current socio-economic changes

Violence before, during and after the two rounds of parliamentary elections claimed the lives of at least 30 people, according to the Interior Ministry, and injured hundreds of others. The Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid put the number of fatalities at 51.

The worst eruption was in Naga Hammadi in the Upper Egyptian town of Qena, where seven people died in gun battles between the supporters of NDP candidate Fahmi Omar and independent El-Sayed El-Menoufi on 6 December — runoff election day. The dead included Omar's son and nephew, who were shot, and his lawyer, who was stabbed.

The high number of fatalities in this case has been attributed to a long-running vendetta between the families of the two candidates. The fighting began when an unidentified person fired shots from a sugar cane field, killing a supporter of El-Menoufi. Violence quickly escalated, with rival groups attacking or ambushing each other. At the end of the day, seven people had died and more than double that number were wounded. Omar, who won the election, commented: "I wish I had lost but kept my son."

Other major incidents of violence were reported in the Nile Delta. At the Kafr Al-Sheikh constituency of Dessouq, a man was killed on 6 December in a fight between the supporters of NDP candidate Abdel-Moneim Zaghloul and independent Abdel-Salam Laimouna, the Interior Ministry said. But the Legal Aid Centre claimed that five people died in clashes between security forces and Laimouna's supporters, who were protesting at the NDP candidate's victory, allegedly as a result of fraud.

The Legal Aid Centre also reported that seven people were killed in similar clashes between security forces and voters protesting the NDP's victory in Qellin, another Kafr Al-Sheikh constituency.

The Interior Ministry said four died in Al-Sawwa village in the governorate of Sharqiya as a result of fights between the supporters of an NDP candidate and his independent rival.

In the view of sociologists, this violence was the result of socio-economic changes the country is undergoing. "Violence is a general phenomenon that appeared in Egyptian society during the past few years. It should be attributed to several sociological, political and economic factors," said Nazek Nosseir, a professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo (AUC).

According to Nosseir, violence is a normal social phenomenon in societies undergoing major changes. "I hope these incidents are just part of a phase that accompanies periods of change in values, norms and other aspects of society. Hopefully, once these changes are accepted, the violence should stop." Sectarian or social divisions could bear some responsibility, she acknowledged, "but they are not the only factors".

"During stages of transformation, violence erupts in societies," agreed Madiha El-Safti, another professor of sociology at AUC, who cited the example of Russia, where major economic and social changes had led to the appearance of violence and crime on a large scale.

El-Safti believes that violence cannot be separated from the general conditions present in society. In her opinion, "election-related violence is part of a larger circle of violence that has taken various forms".

Opposition campaigns against Assembly

Disgruntled opposition parties vowed to bring about the new Assembly's downfall. **Rana Allam** found a rift in opposition ranks, as successful opposition figures claimed they had been fairly elected, while others charged government intervention

Opposition parties, which together won 14 out of the 444 contested seats of the People's Assembly (a 15th seat went to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood), blamed their defeat on wide-scale vote-rigging and harassment. At a news conference last Saturday, opposition leaders vowed "to work together by democratic, constitutional and legal methods to bring about the downfall of the People's Assembly, which was formed by falsifying the will of the voters".

They said they would launch a joint political campaign aimed at "ending the flagrant government violations of the Egyptian citizen's right to participate in free and fair elections, devoid of violence and rigging". The campaign will target Egyptian and foreign personalities, political parties and human rights groups, who will be invited to show solidarity with the "cause of public freedoms" in this country.

The opposition leaders also stressed "the decisive importance of opening the door to a new dialogue and approving a national consensus charter that gives priority to a wide-scale change in the direction of democracy."

Loser Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that although the opposition would use "democratic methods" in its struggle to have the new Assembly dissolved, young people might resort to violence. He charged that the government was making it impossible for people who are demanding change to bring it about by peaceful and democratic methods.

"If these people are deprived of democracy, they will resort to violence," Dawoud said. "Although we are opposed to such methods, we cannot convince young people to be patient."

Another loser, No'man Gomaa, deputy chairman of the Wafd party, warned that "repression will lead to violence. The government deprived us of the peaceful methods of bringing about change. We can't guarantee that young people will keep calm."

The solution recommended by Liberal Party loser Mustafa Bakri was to dissolve the new Assembly and organise new elections. "I despaired," said Bakri, who withdrew from the election race at the last minute. He claimed that his constituency witnessed "massive vote-rigging and irregularities of every kind to favour my opponent, the cabinet minister" — an allusion to Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments).

Dawoud charged that the make-up of the new Assembly was not a true reflection of the comparative levels of support for the ruling National Democratic Party and the opposition. "Now we are faced with a permanent system that makes any change impossible," he said.

According to Bakri, an Assembly where the NDP has such a lopsided majority "will never be able to reflect the people's real problems".

Two winners — the Wafd's Yassin Serageddin and Tagammu's Khaled Mohieddin — told the *Weekly* that there had been no irregularities in their constituencies. But both condemned violations in other constituencies and alleged that opposition representation in the new Assembly was not adequate. "It was like a war," Serageddin claimed.

Although opposition parties vowed to work together, disputes erupted openly at their news conference. Accusations were directed at the leftist Tagammu Party, which was represented at the conference by Dr Samir Fayyad. Other opposition leaders claimed that Tagammu had government backing and that the vote in Mohieddin's constituency had been rigged in his favour.

But this was denied by Mohieddin. "My election monitors had to defend the ballot boxes against the possibility of being rigged," he told the *Weekly*. Mohieddin also pointed out that out of 40 Tagammu candidates, only five managed to win seats.

Dawoud stepped in to try to settle the dispute. "Discrediting members of opposition parties who have joined parliament will not be beneficial for us at this stage," he said. "The claim that some were backed by the government will not help our political efforts."

Bakri, however, replied: "Whoever wants to isolate himself is free to do so."

Mohieddin questioned the opposition's ability to have the new Assembly dissolved. "The only way to do it is to prove that it is illegal, and this will be a difficult task."

Meanwhile Serageddin looked ahead to the new parliamentary session. "As members of parliament, we will have a lot of responsibility," he said. "We will have to make up for quantity with quality."

Watch group warns of election backlash

A revival of prejudices and tribalism in the recent the election battle not only influenced results, but poses a threat to society, warned an election-watch committee



Said El-Naggar



Milad Hanna



Saadedin Ibrahim

Despite the government's insistence that the 6 December election runoffs were conducted with integrity, an independent election-watch committee has reported many irregularities, including vote-rigging, the arrest of candidate supporters and the expulsion of poll monitors from polling stations. However, the committee's report continued, "The most serious phenomenon in the election campaign was the revival of trends posing a threat to social stability, such as sectarianism and tribalism, as well as the sanctioning of fraud, violence and money as effective mechanisms of political action."

The committee, established by six human rights groups and non-governmental organisations, is headed by economist Said El-Naggar and has Milad Hanna, a housing expert, as deputy chairman and sociologist Saadeddin Ibrahim as secretary-general. It deployed about 600 human rights activists to observe the balloting in 88 constituencies during the two rounds of the elections. The government took exception to the committee but did not ban it.

The committee reported receiving a total of 800 complaints during the period between the 29 November first round and the second round a week later. Of these complaints, the committee said it had been able to verify 320, or about 40 per cent. Sixty per cent of these complaints, of which the committee found 192 to be justified, focused on the arrest of candidates' supporters, mainly Islamists as well as supporters of Nasserist, Tagammu and independent candidates.

Islamist candidates, said to total 36, complained that hundreds of their supporters and poll-watchers had been rounded up or harassed. As a result, some of them withdrew from the election race.

Eighty-three complaints alleged that NDP candidates were getting support from local government departments, either by bussing their employees to polling stations or registering them as voters in certain stations, regardless of their residence or work addresses.

In violation of administrative orders, the committee charged that some mosques attached to the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) were used to make propaganda for NDP candidates, while others, unsupervised by the government, were similarly used by candidates of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. A Coptic candidate used at least two churches for the same purpose, the report claimed.

On the eve of the second round, administrative courts ruled that flagrant irregularities had rendered the results of the first round null and void in 109 constituencies, 49 per cent of the nation's total 222, and that consequently the election runoffs in these electoral districts should not be held.

The government filed appeals which were rejected by the administrative courts in some governorates. However, it then filed the same appeals with a summary court in Cairo, which agreed to consider them. "In the government's view," the committee maintained, "this was a legal justification for not implementing the orders of the administrative courts".

On 6 December, runoff election day, the committee said it received 406 complaints, of which 60 per cent were from Islamist candidates, and the remaining 40 per cent from other opposition and independent candidates. The committee reported greater government preparations for the second round, with a heavy presence of security personnel, particularly outside polling stations.

"Flagrant interventions" were alleged in 33 out of the 88 constituencies monitored by committee representatives. They claimed that polling stations were stormed, opposition poll-watchers kicked out and votes rigged in favour of NDP candidates. The committee claimed that those in charge of polling stations and their staff, but not security men, committed "gross violations" in 52 constituencies.

In 22 per cent of the monitored constituencies, polling stations opened at 7.30am, half an hour ahead of schedule, "and there were indications that some NDP representatives had already signed papers testifying that pre-voting measures were sound."

In 40 per cent of the monitored constituencies, polling stations opened late — between 8.30 and 10am. Some polling stations, such as those in the Cairo constituency of Matariya, closed early — between 3.30 and 4pm instead of 5pm.

Candidates' representatives in some constituencies were denied permission to accompany the ballot-boxes as they were transported to the principal polling station for the vote count, giving rise to suspicions that the boxes might have been replaced or their contents tampered with, the committee charged. In addition, the committee claimed that in more than 50 per cent of the monitored constituencies, "judicial supervision was either inadequate, ineffective or not neutral. There were several cases in which candidates or their representatives attempted to submit complaints to the supervising judge, but to no avail."

Voter turnout varied from place to place. While some Cairo polling stations were almost empty, throngs of people gathered to vote in other areas. In general, the turnout was higher in provincial areas. The committee noted that candidates in provincial constituencies did not monitor the polls in the home villages of their opponents. The reason behind this, the report claimed, was that the practice of rigging a candidate's home town vote in his favour had become widely accepted, despite being recognised by law as fraud.

Committee representatives also noticed a revival of family and tribal loyalties in Upper Egypt and some Nile Delta provinces "on a wider scale than in the first round. These trends were also observed in Cairo and Alexandria as a result of family connections with Upper Egyptians."

The "money factor" played a large role, particularly in the second round, according to the committee. "The committee's representatives monitored feverish competition between some candidates and their supporters to distribute money openly on election day, as well as in the weeks preceding the election," the report alleged. "Blankets, shoes and clothes were also distributed in some poor neighbourhoods. And donations, or pledges of donations, were made for the construction of schools, clinics, mosques and sporting clubs."

In contrast to its observations of the first round, the committee report acknowledged that during the second round representatives of all candidates were allowed to watch the vote-count and that some ballot boxes, which committee members claimed were obviously rigged, were actually excluded from the count.

Brotherhood's toe-hold in parliament

The Muslim Brotherhood's lone representative in the new parliament spoke to **Nevine Khalil** about his agenda for the new session

The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood fielded 36 candidates in the recent election battle, according to Brotherhood spokesman Maamoun El-Hodeibi. Several of them withdrew in protest at alleged vote-rigging before polling closed down at 5pm on 6 December. But one Brotherhood candidate, Ali Sayed Fat'h El-Bab, managed to make it to the new People's Assembly, winning a seat as an independent in the Cairo constituency of Tebbin-Helwan.

Fat'h El-Bab won 11,361 votes out of the 21,000 or so cast in his constituency. He claims, however, that his share would have soared to around 15,000 had there been no interference in the election process.

Speaking in the Agouza office which had been his campaign headquarters, Hodeibi said that "about six or seven" Brotherhood candidates had announced their withdrawal in protest at the way the elections were run. "It was not an official withdrawal, but they saw that the situation had got out of hand," he maintained. "They believed that the results had already been decided, and they feared for their safety." Candidates who walked out included Ahmed Salama in Damietta and Abdel-Hamid El-Ghazali in the Cairo constituency of Manial.

Hodeibi himself had contested the elections in the Cairo constituency of Dokki, but was defeated in the first round by Social Affairs Minister Amal Osman.

Fat'h El-Bab, interviewed by the *Weekly*, claimed that his campaign had faced restrictions and that 17 of his supporters were detained before the 29 November first round. Three of them were released shortly afterwards but the remaining 14 were kept behind bars until the second round was over. "These were ways to frighten, hinder or stop the people from showing their support for me," he charged, adding that although opposition parties had faced similar harassment, Islamist candidates had borne the brunt.

He himself decided against withdrawal, "because there were indications that we could continue". Any irregularities in his constituency occurred only towards the end of the day of the runoffs "after the people had already made their choice". The voters' choice had been clear, he maintained: "My immense grassroots support was too obvious for anyone to tamper with."

According to Fat'h El-Bab, his election campaign had not been affected by last month's closure of the Brotherhood's downtown headquarters. "I depended on my popularity and personal connections in the area," he said. Fat'h El-Bab is a member of the council of the Union of Iron and Steel Workers, an industry which is the main lifeline of the Helwan-Tebbin area.

Fat'h El-Bab said he planned to remain as an independent, although there was a possibility of switching to the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, "which would be no betrayal, because there is already an alliance between the Brotherhood and Labour".

Asked about his agenda for the People's Assembly, Fat'h El-Bab replied that it would be dominated by the issues most affecting his industrial constituency and its working-class residents, including the labour laws, and health and social insurance laws which the house is expected to pass during its five-year term. "These are my priorities, along with infrastructure and services."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Dumping: High stakes at stake

The temperature soared as charges of dumping were lodged against an Egyptian kitchenware company operating in South Africa, writes Mohamed Sabreen from Johannesburg

An Egyptian cooking utensils company, Atlas, is facing a bevy of charges of alleged dumping of Egyptian aluminium pots, frying pans, kettles and roasters on the South African market. The case, a first of its kind for Egyptian producers since entering South Africa's market following the lifting of an apartheid-prompted trade embargo, was raised last month by Hendler and Hart (H&H), a South African producer of kitchenware. H&H alleges that Atlas is flooding the market with products sold at lower-than-cost prices.

In a complaint issued before South Africa's Board of Tariffs and Trade (BTT), representatives of Hendler and Hart said that the company's sales had dropped considerably from June 1994 to June 1995, forcing them to decrease the profit margin and cut labour. H&H had for long cornered the lion's share of the kitchen utensils market.

Over a two-year period, company officials maintained, the import of Egyptian aluminium products increased by 2000 per cent, rising from 5501kg in 1993 to a projected 115,520kg in 1995.

As a countermeasure to this dramatic surge in imported Egyptian aluminium, the company is demanding that an anti-dumping duty be imposed on aluminium hollowware exported from Egypt. H&H's officials claim that, using the international price of aluminium as a base price for the cost of the raw material, they have calculated their "own estimate of the conversion cost, plus a reasonable addition for sales and administrative expenses and profits.z" They reported to the BTT that the per kg price for imported Egyptian aluminium kitchenware sold on the South African market is 3.33 rands (R) or slightly over $1. This price is some R8 less than the average price of similar imports. The company also charged that international prices for raw materials are higher than the import prices of finished Egyptian aluminium products.

Atlas's Deputy Chairman Mohamed Talaat, who was in Johannesburg last week to discuss the case with South African officials, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, vehemently denied the charges.

"The cost of labour for this industry in Egypt, and the total investment costs, are much lower than in South Africa," he said. Talaat added that Egyptian exports to South Africa have also benefited from a reduction in customs duties. Until the end of last September, imports were subject to a 30 per cent customs duty, and an additional 15 per cent fee. The latter was removed at the beginning of October, making Egyptian products a cheaper option for South African consumers.

Although the new government in South Africa has adopted liberal trade policies which have opened the market and served to combat monopolies, said Talaat, "efforts by some companies to curb the growth of Egyptian products in the market represent an attempt to return to monopolistic policies."

Refuting charges by H&H that Egypt has been exporting products to South Africa at less than the price of its raw materials, Talaat claimed that the price of Egyptian aluminium sheeting is 70 per cent higher than the international price.

The South African market, he noted, is capable of absorbing goods in a wide range of prices. While, said Talaat, Egyptian kitchen utensil sets sell for R90-125, sets produced by H&H sell for R117-125 and sets from Zimbabwe sell for R60-80.

Egyptian businessmen are confident that the verdict in the case will be in Egypt's favour, but they did entertain the notion that H&H could win the case. This, they maintain, could jeopardise Egypt's stake in South Africa's market.

Mohamed Askar, of the Egyptian Company for Trade and Marketing, said that an unfavorable verdict in this case could stigmatise all Egyptian exports to South Africa. He expressed his fear that charges of dumping could carry over to other competitively priced Egyptian products.

Ahmed El-Hadidy, the National Bank of Egypt's (NBE) representative in South Africa, concurs. He warned that a verdict in favour of H&H may prompt the South African government to levy prohibitively high duties on all Egyptian goods. These duties could reach 300 per cent.

"The repercussions would not be felt only by aluminium products, which would be forced out of the market," said El-Hadidy. "This case would set a precedent that could be used by other South African producers who have suffered as a result of competition from Egyptian products." For Egyptian producers, this could be a costly decision, given that from April 1994 to April 1995, Egyptian exports to South Africa reached R97 million. The country also acts as a transit route for imports to its landlocked neighbours.

El-Hadidy said that since the economic embargo on South Africa was lifted, a number of Egyptian companies have entered that country's market with high quality, reasonably priced goods, enabling them to corner a large share of the market. H&H, which had previously monopolised the hollowware market, was hit hard as consumers opted for more competitively priced Egyptian products.

"From my studies of the South African markets, I have noticed that the profit margin sought by local companies is exaggerated," said El-Hadidy. "This explains why consumers were quick to turn to imported goods."

Asserting that the dumping charge is illogical, he argued that in cases of dumping, companies sell their goods at lower-than-cost prices, thereby registering a loss. In most cases, these industries are subsidised by the government.

"But in this case, the accused company is a private company, and the Egyptian government does not subsidise private companies," he said. "So why would they (Atlas) be selling their products at a loss?"

According to other businessmen, this kind of charge is not new in South Africa. Hisham Abdel-Kader, an Egyptian businessman who resides in South Africa, said that South Africa's producers have previously accused Chinese, Zimbabwean and Pakistani producers of dumping. He claims that the South African market is dominated by monopolies and cartels that fix prices.

"Any attempts to provide the market with cheaper, higher quality goods, are met with fierce resistance aimed at pushing this product out of the market," said Abdel-Kader.

This, he noted, is the motivation behind H&H's accusation, adding that other competitive imports will probably face similar allegations.

"Other Egyptian exporters hoping to enter the South African market will probably face the same obstacles," he said. "These monopolies go against the very nature of international free trade policies."

The stakes, and the gains, in the hollowware market are sizable. The market for kitchen utensils in South Africa is valued at R250 million, and local producers like H&H must compete with exporters such as Zimbabwe, Egypt and China. Since Egypt's entry into the South African market, Egyptian imports have succeeded in taking a large share of the pie, currently estimated at 7 per cent. Market analysts attribute this success to the high quality Egyptian exports and the fact that their prices appeal tremendously to varying depths of the pockets of South Africa's 40 million consumers.

EFTA bridges trade gap

In tandem with the Barcelona Conference's aims, the EFTA last week stepped up efforts for establishing another trade pact with southern Mediterranean countries, writes Gamil Ibrahim from Geneva

As the European Union's (EU) 15 member states sought to outline the perimeters of a free trade area with its Mediterranean neighbours, the remaining non-EU western European nations were also quick to climb aboard the partnership bandwagon.

Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, the four remaining countries in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), last week extended an invitation to ministers from Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia for a two-day ministerial conference in the Swiss mountain resort of Zermatt.

Representing Egypt was Minister of Economy Mahmoud Mohamed Mahmoud, who signed a declaration on economic cooperation which covered trade and investment. The declaration, signed by Iceland's minister of foreign affairs on behalf of the EFTA, is hoped to lead to the establishment of a free trade agreement between Egypt and EFTA's four non-EU member states. A joint Egyptian-EFTA committee will be convened in order to determine the areas of cooperation and to prepare for an agreement. Both Tunisia and Morocco signed a similar agreement.

Commenting on the accord, Mahmoud told the daily *Al Ahram* that cooperation with the EFTA is of special significance, given especially that these countries are among Egypt's major exporters of chemical components, machinery, telecommunication equipment, foodstuffs, wood and printing paper. "These countries are also major importers of Egyptian cotton textiles, fruits and vegetables," he pointed out.

Mahmoud, however, added that Egypt's exports to those EFTA countries fall far short of their potentials. "We hope that a cooperation agreement will help Egypt boost its exports and narrow the trade deficit between Egypt and those countries," he said.

Mounir Zahran, Egypt's ambasador to the United Nations' Geneva headquarters, said the signed declaration falls in line with the principles espoused by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and seeks to remove all technical barriers obsructing Egypt's foreign trade. It will also expand the scope of cooperation to include technology transfer and intellectual property rights. The agreement also fosters industrial development and encourages investment.

The meeting in Zermatt comes less than two weeks after the EU-Mediterranean conference held in Barcelona which aimed at strengthening political, economic and cultural relations between the EU and southern Mediterranean countries. The EU, which aims at establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by the year 2010, has already signed agreements with Tunisia and Israel. Other negoatiations are also under way between the EU and Morocco, Egypt and Jordan.

EFTA, which lost three of its members: Austria, Finland and Sweden to the EU, has been active in concluding trade agreements with neighbouring countries. Last week, it signed trade pacts with the three Baltic states, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Three years ago, in September 1992, Israel signed an agreement with the EFTA which took effect on 1 January, 1993.

Unemployment vs. unemployment

Tens of thousands of Egyptian workers were forced to leave the country as Jordan clamped down on its foreign workers in an effort to fight unemployment. Mona El-Fiqi reports

Despite the efforts of the Jordanian government to boost foreign investor confidence in the run up to the second Middle East/North Africa economic summit held in Amman last October, the repercussions of the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis continue to plague the Jordanian economy. The country was severely harmed by an economic blockade, the loss of traditional Jordanian markets, and the return of over half a million Jordanian expatriates from the Gulf countries. The results were high unemployment levels and social bottlenecks. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Jordanian government recently introduced new regulations for its foreign workforce.

Egyptians working illegally in Jordan were given an ultimatum: secure work permits by 26 October, or leave the country. Gomaa El-Ebady, press counsellor at the Jordanian Embassy in Cairo, commented, "A few months ago the Jordanian Ministry of Labour introduced this new measure to regularise foreign labour in the Jordanian market. Each foreign worker is now required to obtain a work permit from the ministry." He added that such regulations are aimed at giving priority to Jordanian employees in acquiring jobs. The Jordanian government imposed the new regulations in August of this year in an effort to tackle persistent unemployment, which is officially pegged at 15 percent of its one million-strong workforce.

El-Ebady explained that the new regulations were decided after liaising with both the Egyptian Ministry of Labour and the Egyptian Embassy in Jordan. At Jordan's request, the Egyptian government launched a new policy to reduce the number of Egyptians go to Jordan. So far, it has not been difficult for Egyptians without a permanent job in their home country to gain access to the Jordanian job market. Even though the Jordanian government banned the employment of non-Jordanians in 15 professional fields, foreigners are free to work in certain areas such as agriculture and construction.

A Jordanian Ministry of Labour official quoted by the Associated Press (AP) said that according to official figures obtained last week, 70,000 foreign workers, mostly Egyptians, have already left the country.

Abdel-Qader El-Assar of Egypt's Ministry of Manpower, conceded that out of the 250,000 Egyptians working in Jordan, around 100,000 are working illegally. El-Assar said that the expiry of the deadline has forced many Egyptian workers to seek hideouts in cities other than Amman.

He said the ministry has no official figures on the number of Egyptians forced to leave Jordan, "because this is not a mass deportation. Illegal workers are deported on a case by case basis."

El-Assar maintained that because Egyptians do not need a visa or an official work permit to enter Jordan, they were encouraged to accept jobs with employers who, themselves, did not feel obliged to prepare contracts. Therefore, without official work permits, thousands of Egyptian workers are now unable to prove they actually have jobs.

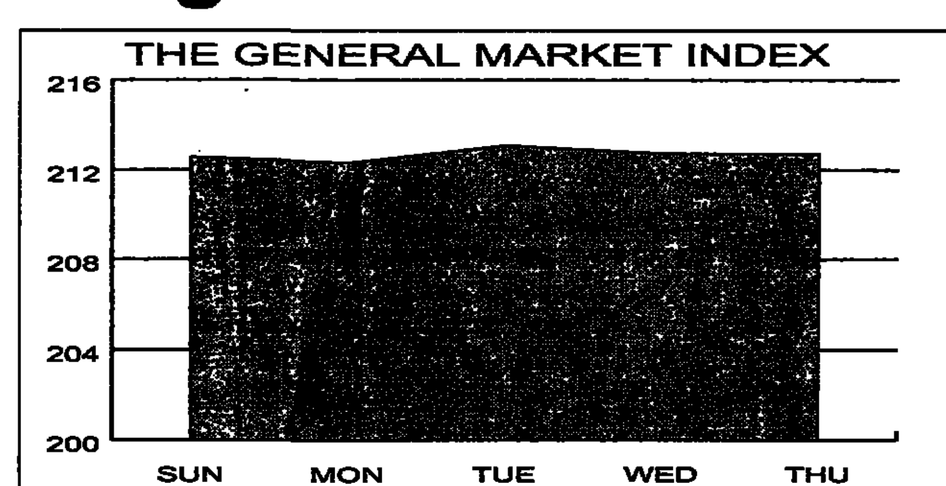
"After the expiry of the October deadline, workers found to be in violation of the regulations are deported, and employers face heavy fines," he added.

Market report

Marginal gains for market

THE CAPITAL market index continued its upward trend for the second week in a row, gaining 0.06 points to close at 212.72 points for the week ending 7 December. The marginal increase came despite a decline in the volume of transactions, which fell from LE45.7 million the previous week to LE41.62 million.

The manufacturing sector's index gained 1.11 points over the week to level off at 290.69. A number of manufacturing sector companies performed well on the market, one of which was Pfizer, Egypt, whose shares registered the greatest increase in value, increasing by 12.5 per cent of their value to close at LE11.99. Shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries Company gained LE10 per share to close at LE685, while those of Abu Keir Fertilisers and Chemical Industries rose by LE1.5 per share to close at LE46. Nile Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries' shares also gained LE1.5 per share and closed at LE56.65 per share.



However, shares of El-Nasr for Clothing and Textiles (Kabo), plummeted by LE8.2 per share to level off at LE155.8 per share by the end of the week. And while the Helwan Portland Cement Company (HPC) topped the market in terms of the volume of transactions, its shares lost LE0.08 per share to close at LE35.92 per share. The company traded LE10.62 million in shares, or 41 per cent of the total volume of transactions.

In the financial sector, trading was weak, and the sector's index lost 0.57 points to reach 218.09. Among the few companies whose shares registered an increase in value was the Commercial International Bank (CIB). Its shares gained LE0.15 to close at LE515.65. Shares of El-Mohandes Bank increased by LE0.45 to close at LE14.7 per share. The Suez Canal Bank's shares, however, fell by LE1 to close at LE48 per share.

In the service sector, Egypt Hotels (Hilton) was the biggest loser, with the company's shares sliding by LE6.28 to close at LE58.22 per share.

In all, the shares of 24 companies increased in value, 23 decreased and 38 remained unchanged.

A boost to investor confidence

A new share offer and a mutual fund established last month boosted investors' spirits, reports Mona Qassem

Investors were pleased by last month's burst of activity on the capital market, and rightly so, given the way the market had been see-sawing over the past few months. But the flurry of activity, which took many investors and analysts by surprise, was actually the product of increased investor confidence brought about by the fact that a number of companies held their annual shareholder meetings. In addition, the introduction of Banque du Caire's mutual fund and the privatisation of Helwan Portland Cement Company, which was managed by the Misr Exterior Bank, spurred market activity over the month.

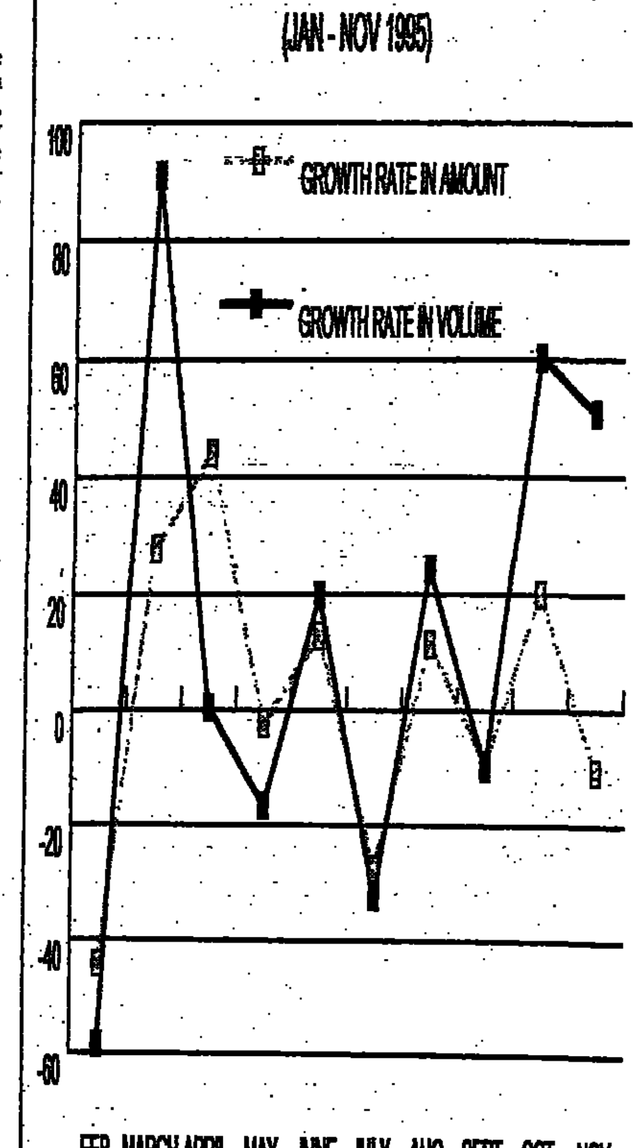
As a promising indicator of restored investor confidence, the newly-established LE100 million mutual fund sold all of its certificates during the six-day sales period. Last summer, investor confidence had eroded and it took almost two and a half months to cover all subscriptions for the mutual funds offered by Banque Misr, the National Bank of Egypt's second fund offering and the Allied Investors Insurance Fund. Competition between these funds, coupled with a drop in capital market activities, resulted in a decrease in demand. Banque du Caire was able to sell its fund certificates so easily due to the fact that it picked an opportune moment when there were no other competitors on the scene.

The successful sale of the shares of Helwan Portland Cement Company was another good indicator of market confidence over the past month. The company set a minimum 500,000 shares to be sold during the offer at LE34 per share, and investors quickly placed orders exceeding LE190 million, or 6 million shares.

The move by investors to buy into these new investments contributed to an overall increase in market activity over the month's trading, bringing the General Market Index up by 1.74 points to reach 212.66 at the end of November. The volume of shares traded rose by 50.9 per cent over October levels to slightly exceed LE533.6 million.

This increase came about after the shares of 130 companies were traded over the month, out of which 42 companies witnessed an increase in the value of their shares, 22 decreased and 66 remained at their October levels.

Several companies registered major gains in November, among which was the North Cairo Mills Company, whose shares increased by more than 30 per cent to close at LE73 compared to LE56.25 at the beginning of November. The Torah Portland Cement Company also landed in the winner's circle with its shares closing at LE48 per share compared to LE46.5 at the beginning of the month. Shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries company rose by LE30 to level off at the end of the month at LE675. Shares of the Extracted Oils Company closed at LE45.6 at the end of the month, an LE2.31 increase from its opening value of LE43.29. Suez Cement's shares rose from LE42.3 per share to LE43.25 by the end of November.



Edited by **Ghada Ragab**





Palestinian civilians wave and reach out as they welcome armed Palestinian police to Nablus last Tuesday,48 hours ahead of schedule *(photo: Reuter)*

Money and guns

This week Israeli troops pulled out of the West Bank town of Nablus, but the legacy of occupation can be seen in the high stake scrabble for a piece of the action under self-rule, writes **Graham Usher** from Nablus

The killing of 20-year-old Talal Abu Issa during clashes with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) in Nablus on 8 December marked a macabre, if fitting, epitaph to Israel's 28-year-old tenure in the city. The Israeli army began withdrawing from the West Bank's second largest city after Jerusalem on Monday, making way for the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to assume responsibility for the civic life and security of its 120,000 or so inhabitants.

Most Palestinians in Nablus have been looking forward to this day, regardless of how they feel about the Oslo accords. Recent months have witnessed an upsurge of violence in the city that has left at least a dozen Palestinians dead and scores wounded. The cause, says spokesman of the Joint Committee of Nationalist and Islamist Institutions in Nablus, Haj Hussam Hajjawi, is the "continuous daily abuse by the Israeli army of Palestinians in Nablus".

This is the official line. But locals will tell you otherwise. For them the violence in Nablus is much more the outgrowth of turf wars between rival factions of Arafat's Fatah movement, as each stakes its claim for a share of political and personal power in advance of their leader's imminent arrival in the city.

There are, say Palestinian sources, now "around 9 to 11" armed Fatah groups operating in Nablus. Their members are young, unemployed and usually from the poorer districts of the Old City, villages and refugee camps. Their victims tend to be each other or alleged Palestinian collaborators. Last month, four Palestinians were shot, one seriously, as "punishment" for "dealing in weapons and drugs" in Nablus' Balata refugee camp by a previously unknown group calling itself "The Black Tigers of Abu Jihad".

Were these groups to confine their "policing" to small-time crooks and the camps, little notice would be taken of them. The problem for Arafat is that they occasionally target bigger fish.

In August, the home of Nablus' mayor, Al-Shak'a, was fired on by armed Fatah activists after one of their members had been arrested and beaten by the city's municipal police. Last year, the offices of the Arab Insurance Company, owned by one of the city's biggest family heads, Ibrahim Abdel-Hadi, were trashed by Fatah-aligned youths after a dispute over a "traffic accident". In the meantime, clashes and general strikes have flared unabated in the city for the last year. None of this has been particularly good for business.

In an attempt to restore some kind of order, the Joint Committee in October issued a "National Honour Charter" urging "national unity based on democracy and dialogue" and "rejecting the militarisation of society which will lead to crime, chaos, tension and the sabotage of the economy". In November, the established Fatah leadership in Nablus imposed a ban on all weapons in the city except those belonging to "owners of jewelry stores and merchants and companies". Fatah, ran the statement, would "strike the hands of violators with a fist of iron."

The warnings have had little effect. On 15 and 30 November major confrontations erupted between Palestinian youths and the army, leaving over 20 injured. In October, Samir Al-Kurdi was killed as a "collaborator and offender against morality". One month later, another Palestinian, Sabi Ali Aisheh, was shot dead for similar crimes. "We are riding in a coach without brakes," says one Nablus journalist, "driven by a crazy man".

The "crazy man" he means is Ahmed Tarbuk, self-declared leader of Nablus' Fatah Hawks, the largest and certainly most feared militia operating in Nablus. It is the Hawks that have been behind most of the confrontations with the Israelis, say sources, and have claimed responsibility for at least four "collaborator" killings and around 18 punishments in recent months. The punishments are meted out for "moral, social and national crimes" and usually take the form of the victim's kneecaps being blown away by a shotgun. They are carried out, says Tarbuk, because "somebody has to take responsibility for order around here."

For the Israeli press, which is currently having a field day with Nablus, Tarbuk is an "Arafat thug" bent on terrorising the city in readiness for the PNA. For Nablus' merchant and landowning classes — who undisguisedly loathe the Hawks — Tarbuk is a "gangster and criminal" pure and simple. But Palestinian attitudes to him in his home-base of the Casbah and in the villages and camps are far more ambivalent.

On 6 December, a rumour, fanned by the Israeli press, went abroad that Tarbuk had been killed in an internecine fight with a rival Fatah group. The next day he was carried shoulder-high by a crowd of 300 through the city centre. Such populism is generated less by the wild justice that Tarbuk and the Hawks dispense; it has much more to do with what they represent, politically and socially.

Tarbuk and the Hawks are very much the products of the Intifada generation. A local grassroots Fatah leader in the Casbah, Tarbuk has spent nine of his 30 years in Israeli prisons. He has around 100 men under his command, all from the same milieu — poor and relatively uneducated Fatah activists who nevertheless had power during the Intifada as prison leaders and armed fighters. With the installation of the PNA in Gaza and Jericho and now the extension of autonomy in the West Bank, they have seen this power whittle away. Their struggle now, via "policing", is a rearguard action to prevent any further erosion.

Tarbuk says he has no political gripe with Oslo and recognises the authority of both Arafat and the PNA. What he and his followers want, says one, "is a piece of the action", a position in the autonomy commensurate with their former status as fighters against the occupation. It is a call that has so far gone unheeded.

Since his return to Gaza and Jericho, Arafat has been seen to largely ignore the concerns of the "fighters" in favour of the political influence and "money" of the city's big families. He unilaterally appointed Shak'a as mayor, despite dissent from within Fatah and from the PLO's opposition groups. Recent months have also seen the PLO leader trying to woo expatriate Nablusis like the president of the Jordan-based Arab Bank, Abdul Hamid Shoman, and the billionaire, Sbeih Masri, as a way of attracting diaspora capital back to the "homeland". Sources say that Shak'a is likely to be on Fatah's list for the forthcoming Palestinian Council elections.

The signs are clear: in the new dispensation thrown up by self-rule it is going to be the city's traditional big families and middle classes that stand to gain, not the fighters nor the Palestinians from the Casbah, villages and camps. Tarbuk and the fragmentation of Fatah into contending gangs are thus not expressions of power, but rather of imminent disempowerment. Violence — the ability to scare the big families and stall the redeployment — is the only card they have left to play.

How Arafat will deal with "the boys in the boots" is an open question. In Gaza, he contained the Hawks by absorbing them into the PNA's police and myriad intelligence forces. Tarbuk says he wants a job "in the Palestinian police", but it is clear that he won't accept anything less than the kudos he enjoyed as a fighter. If he continues to cause trouble, Arafat has around 1,200 police arriving with the PNA once it takes over Nablus. This is more than enough to deal with Tarbuk and every other militia.

But Arafat tends to prefer co-option to coercion, especially when it comes to fractious elements from inside his own movement. "Arafat wants a national unity government for the interim period," says director of the Nablus-based Centre for Palestine Research and Studies, Said Kenan. "The last thing he wants is any kind of class struggle." If so, and if Fatah's non-ideological brand of nationalism is to hold together, Arafat is going to need the loyalty of people like Tarbuk every bit as much as the money of families like Shak'a and Masri. As in Gaza and Jericho, self-rule in Nablus augurs an uneasy alliance between money and guns.

Full speed ahead

With the US fuelling fresh attempts to jump start talks, pundits are predicting moves along the Syrian-Israeli track, **Hoda Tawfiq** reports from Washington

Presidents Clinton and Al-Assad, and Prime Minister Peres have agreed to move full speed to secure a peace agreement between Israel and Syria within the months ahead. There has been a flurry of activity at the highest level, with commitments by all the three leaders, since the assassination of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Optimistic and upbeat about the prospects of renewing talks between Syria and Israel, President Clinton is due to dispatch Warren Christopher to Syria to press on with the peace process in the Middle East, after the signing ceremony on the Balkan peace accord in Paris today.

Pledging to intensify efforts to end a four-year stalemate over the future of the Golan Heights, the secretary of state will communicate to President Al-Assad the essential elements of Clinton's meeting with Peres, as agreed upon betweeen the prime minister and Clinton. The most important thing, the US president stressed, is that there is a better atmosphere than ever before; "The hurdles and differences are still there. Great hurdles have to be overcome, but an Israeli-Syrian settlement is worth our effort."

An administration official and member of the American peace negotiating team added that, "We now believe that Syria and Israel are willing to entertain very seriously a renewed negotiating effort." Highlighting what Washington considers to be the crucial factor, he added that "unlike in the past, we do not see either side imposing conditions and that is an important change."

Christopher will fly from Paris to Damascus and then travel on to Israel. He may also visit Cairo, Amman and Jericho, and possibly even make a second visit to the Syrian capital before returning home on the 19th.

The big question is what the Israeli prime minister is offering to secure peace with Syria, and whether he has committed himself to evacuate completely from the Golan. For Syria, this is the only basis for peace with Israel.

Publicly, Peres has refused to commit himself to full withdrawal, insisting that an Israeli pullout is a part of a package deal for peace with Syria. "We are trying now, through the good offices of the United States, to compose an overall plan, where the territorial aspect can be a part of it, but not the only part," said Peres in his discussions with Clinton.

The package deal Peres is offering represents a global and regional approach, as well as tackling the elements of the peace treaty with Syria. He did not offer any new suggestions, but rather expressed readiness to move on with full speed in the negotiations, dropping previous conditions such as agreement on early warning stations on the Golan.

An administration official, spelling out the Peres approach, said "There is now an effort to see the totality of all the issues, and how they might fit together in a way that has them focusing not just on the security issue and arrangements, but also the context of peace, the scope of withdrawal, the security arrangements, the time frame and the broader region at work."

This substance is related to procedure. At the centre of Christopher's discussions with President Al-Assad will be the search for a new and practical mechanism for negotiations. "We have to find a way to move from where we are to where we are going to need to be," commented the US official.

Despite Peres' optimistic statements while in Washington, officials said that there have not been any substantive breakthroughs on the central issue: the future of the Golan Heights. Any such advance, they warned, is likely to come only after sustained peace talks, not simply from Christopher's Middle East journey.

But administration officials are stressing a change of mood in Syria, possibly a more flexible approach to resolving its territorial dispute with Israel. Yet it is still too early to judge precisely if the general statements of seriousness can be translated into something that is specific.

Qatar: out of step

By Hassan Abu-Taleb

The fifteenth Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) summit held in Muscat was dealt a critical political blow with the abrupt withdrawal of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the emir of Qatar, from the summit's closing session. This session is usually reserved for issuing invitations for the next GCC summit and for the announcement of GCC resolutions. Ironically, Qatar is scheduled to hold the next GCC summit in 1996.

The emir's absence meant that invitations for the next summit were not issued. In short, a blanket of ambiguity now surrounds the long-held tradition of the GCC leaders meeting held every December to reach a consensus on various regional and international issues. It is this tradition which has distinguished the GCC experience from that of other Arab blocs and helped it in settling conflicts between members.

According to Qatar, the emir's withdrawal was triggered by the GCC's failure to accept Qatar's foreign minister as the next GCC secretary-general. To compound matters, the Saudi nominee, Sheikh Jamil Al-Hajilan, was accepted for the post by the other five states. To Qatar, the choice of the GCC secretary-general is a question of substance that requires unanimity according to Article Nine of the GCC charter. Hence, the nomination of the Saudi candidate is in violation of the terms of the GCC charter because it was not based on unanimity.

The other GCC states, however, regard the nomination of the secretary-general as a procedural matter which requires a majority vote and that the final determining factor is the decision of the GCC leaders themselves. In essence, this dispute reflects the lack of clarity in the GCC charter over what is an issue of substance and what is a procedural matter.

In a press statement following the emir's withdrawal from the council's closing session, the Qatari foreign minister firmly denied his country's intention of suspending its GCC membership. Nevertheless, the crisis itself reveals an important change in the agenda of the GCC and it its symbolic and moral value to Qatar's new emir who rose to power last June. Qatar's official statements appear to favour an escalation of tension, rather than looking forward to an easing of it. Admittedly, Qatar has withdrawn from previous GCC meetings to underscore its objection to certain technical or procedural matters. But this is the first time that Qatar has withdrawn from a high-level meeting of this kind. Qatar's latest move goes against the Gulf tradition which rejects a public admission of a crisis within the group.

It seems that the Qatari leadership did not consider the consequences of the country's withdrawal from the GCC meetings. One main repercussion was the omission of a text in the closing declaration welcoming Sheikh Hamad's first attendance at the GCC annual summit in his capacity as the new emir of Qatar. The omission was intended as a moral and symbolic penalty, and it withholds the Gulf states' support of the new Qatari regime.

It is no secret that Sheikh Hamad deposed his father on account of their differences vis-à-vis Qatar's position on various Gulf and Arab issues. Qatar is particularly sensitive about Saudi Arabia and its powerful influence in the region. Sheikh Hamad favours a tougher policy line towards its powerful Gulf neighbour over the question of their shared borders. Qatar is also still squirming from Saudi's refusal to allow Israeli planes to fly over its air space. Saudi's decision was instrumental in wrecking the Israeli-Qatari agreement aimed at creating an air route between both states.

The new emir is also partial to resuming ties with Iraq under the Saddam regime. In addition, he favours the strengthening of Qatar's ties with Iran to balance Saudi's support of Bahrain in the Qatar-Bahrain border dispute. Moreover, Sheikh Hamad seeks to establish stronger economic ties with Israel. All these policies go against the GCC policy lines. These policies were underscored in the final communiqué issued by the GCC states in their summit in Muscat.

The final communiqué reiterated the GCC states' position that they will only resume ties with Iraq after it complies with all UN resolutions. The communiqué also stated the GCC states' decision to postpone dealing with Iran and urged the latter to end its occupation of the three United Arab Emirate islands. The GCC states also linked the establishment of relations with Israel to the fulfilment of a comprehensive and just peace.

There is little doubt that it is the differences between the new Qatari emir and the GCC states which are the main reason behind the withdrawal of Sheikh Hamad from the summit's closing session, rather than the GCC states' rejection of Qatar's choice.

Qatar's withdrawal from the Muscat summit is a warning of the need to rebuild confidence between the GCC states by tackling pending bilateral disputes. The incident also highlights the need to re-examine the GCC charter's legal terms and address the ambiguity arising from its texts. More importantly, Qatar needs to review its position to avert an escalation of the conflict.

Should Qatar withdraw from the GCC, the council's political influence would be weakened and its chances of surviving as a regional bloc in possession of half of the world's oil reserves and a quarter of its natural gas would be much reduced. At a time when each Arab Gulf state could do with more cooperation and joint effort, a settlement is required now more than ever.

Castro courts China

Castro's visit to China last week was an attempt by the Cuban president to woo investors. **Faiza Rady** looks at how the Caribbean nation is struggling to wriggle out of the recently tightened grip of a US economic blockade

On 29 November, Cuban President Fidel Castro started his historic 10-day visit to China, the first in more than three decades. Since the Sino-Soviet ideological split over economic strategies, bilateral relations between Havana and Beijing were kept at a strict minimum. "Previously," explained a Cuban diplomat, "people thought the Soviet model should be applied to all socialist countries. Today, we know that any policy of openness must be based on the specific conditions of each country." Therefore, it was economic rather than ideological issues that dominated the leadership discussions.

The Cuban president's visit signalled his search for new trade partners and his determination to break the economic stranglehold imposed by a 32-year-old US blockade of his country. The visit comes in the wake of a flurry of recent meetings with Spanish, Italian and French representatives of the European Union (EU), aimed at mapping out an economic agreement with Havana. So far, Cuba is the only Latin American country lacking official ties with the EU, although European investment is high and the union provided the Caribbean island with some $18 million in humanitarian aid last year. Moreover, 11 European countries have embassies in Cuba and the council of EU ministers is currently debating the implementation of an accord.

Other indications of Castro's overtures to foreign investors included his meetings with David Rockefeller during the UN 50th anniversary celebration in New York, as well as his hosting of a 50-member high-level delegation of US businessmen in Havana last October. The meeting was sponsored by the giant Times-Warner communication conglomerate and represented multinationals of the stature of General Motors, Hyatt Hotels, Sears and Harley Davidson, who were seeking potential high-return investments in Cuba's agro-industry and the developing tourist sector. "We consider Cuba a particularly attractive business opportunity," said Thomas Polski, spokesman for the Radisson Hotel chains. The thought was echoed by Keith Broussard, vice-president of the American Rice Federation: "The American rice industry believes that the Cuban market will have a great potential, once the embargo is lifted."

Since the 1989 break-up of the Soviet Union, once Castro's major trading partner and political ally, Cuba's economy has been in a shambles. The American blockade, prohibiting US companies and their Third World subsidiaries from trading with Cuba, has put a stranglehold on its development. The embargo was further intensified in October 1992, when the so-called Cuban Democracy Act — also known as the Toricelli law — prohibited foreign carriers heading for Cuba to cross US waterways. At the time, this American "democracy act" was strongly condemned in the UN General Assembly for affecting "other nations' sovereignty and freedoms of trade and navigation". Last month, the Assembly once again almost unanimously passed a resolution demanding an end to the embargo against Cuba — with only the US, Israel and Uzbekistan voting against. Publicly siding with the US, however, has not prevented Israel from investing in Cuba's lucrative agro-business.

Despite European and back-door Israeli investments, the blockade has had disastrous effects on the economy. It has especially isolated Cuba from US-dependent Latin and South American countries, which would face severe sanctions and aid restrictions if they broke the terms of the embargo. "Many foreign firms planning to invest in Cuba keep their plans secret, because once their plans are known they are subjected to implacable persecution. We have statistics showing that eight out of 10 business ventures are interrupted," explained Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina.

In fact, the US reinforced its assault on Cuba's economy last October, when the Senate voted to approve the Burton-Helms bill that would prohibit American companies from buying Cuban products through a third party. The bill, which will become law if passed by the House of Representatives, also directs the administration to further isolate Cuba by blocking its membership in international financial institutions. "We must vote to *throttle* Fidel Castro," affirmed ultra-conservative Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms, chief *sponsor of the legislation. "Without foreign* currency from the outside, Mr Castro's days will certainly be numbered." Although President Bill Clinton's tactics differ from Senator Helms', his aims are similar. Clinton — who, incidentally, received a $275,000 campaign contribution from the Miami-based Cuban contra leader Mas Canosa — seeks to intensify the embargo, while developing *informal cultural* and political exchanges between the two countries, ostensibly to promote democracy, US-style. Beyond economic stifling, Clinton believes that cultural ties would further undermine socialism from within. Buried under self-righteous posturing and packaged with politically expedient "democracy" and "human rights" jargon, Clinton's real message was not lost on the Cubans. "Let us not harbour any illusions. All these measures are only designed to control our country. They aren't debating whether they should or shouldn't behead us, but whether they should use a knife or a razor [to do it]," commented Foreign Minister Robaina.

Cuban President Fidel Castro adjusts his vietcong hat" after failing an attempt to enter the famous Cu Chi tunnels from where Vietcong fighters launched their attacks on US troops. Castro did not pursue entering the tunnel since it was too little for him *(photo: Reuter)*

Siding with powerful multinationals eager to invest in the island, the *Washington Post* manifested a strategic and timely interest in Cuba's welfare. "The passage of Burton-Helms would only aggravate the suffering of the Cuban people and increase the probability of trouble and violence ... a nightmarish scenario," read its 23 September editorial.

In a 20 February interview with *Time* magazine, the Cuban president effectively described the hardship born by his embattled people. Referring to what he calls the "special period" — the time since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the passage of the Toricelli law — Castro commented: "We have lost more than 70 per cent of our *imports. We were left without credits, without* capital, without technology and without markets. No other country would have been able to endure such a situation without a system similar to ours because it would not have been able to guarantee an equitable distribution of resources."

In 1992, Cuba had to reduce its oil imports by half — paying $850 million, or one-third of its total annual resources, to cover the country's most basic needs. Western diplomats estimate that 80 per cent of the island's industrial production is paralysed because of oil shortages. In order to reduce power consumption, the electric company has cut its supply to an eight-hour daily cycle, so that people have to make do without electricity for most of their waking hours. Because of the high cost of gasoline, most people can no longer afford to drive their cars and now use bicycles as a means of transportation. Since 1990, the government has been forced to reduce food subsidies by 60 per cent. Infant formula and powdered milk imports *now only partially cover children's needs* up to the age of seven. And according to UNICEF reports, about half of six to 12-year-olds are anaemic. The deterioration of the sewage system has caused an upsurge in diseases such as amoebic dysentery and typhoid that had practically disappeared before the "special period".

Since 1993, the increasing hardship has forced Castro to look for politically unattractive, "market economy" solutions. Besides legalising hard currency holdings and using the dollar for transactions in special stores, the government permitted the creation of small businesses and alloted hard currency salaries to workers in the tourist industry. But most importantly, the 5 September legislation allows businesses to fully operate with foreign capital and establishes tax-free zones as a foreign investment incentive.

Despite these concessions to economic neo-liberalism, the leadership claims to be holding on to the basic tenents of socialism. "Our system must adapt to the re*alities of today's world, without us re*nouncing our ideas and our objectives," explained Castro. Economist Julio Carranza accordingly outlined a broad strategy for Cuba's reform plans. He believes the state must continue to control the economy's fundamental mechanisms through the partial ownership of the means of production and the regulation of fiscal and monetary policies. "The state must also remain responsible for maintaining free education, as well as health services for the poor, and has to protect national interests against the encroachment of foreign capital," writes Carranza.

But how does such a plan differ from any social democratic platform? And how can the Cuban government reconcile communism with reforms that have introduced social inequalities in a system that was, until recently, profoundly egalitarian? Squeezed between "the knife and the razor", Fidel Castro has found no immediate alternative to salvage his country's besieged economy. Whether he can manage to *salvage socialism in the process remains to* be seen.

Bangladesh blasts

IN THE run-up to the Bangladeshi elections next month, the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka witnessed a new round of explosions, just hours after the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia ordered the surrender of huge stocks of illegal weapons hoarded by opposition groups.

Two activists from the Jamaat Islamiya party were seriously injured when a bomb exploded during a street rally. Two bombs exploded in front of the residence of the country's Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman. Another bomb went off as supporters of a 72-hour general strike marched through Dhaka's Motijheel commercial district. The strike is part of opposition parties' campaign to bring down the government of Premier Zia.

SADC summit

THE HEADS of state of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) met on Monday in South Africa to discuss the possibility of the imposition of economic and cultural sanctions against Nigeria. Nigeria, which is not a SADC member, has been internationally condemned for hanging playwright Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other environmentalists and human rights activists.

Opposition to the imposition of full diplomatic sanctions by some SADC leaders, such as Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe and Namibia's President Sam Nujoma, convinced President Mandela to keep the diplomatic issue off the SADC summit's official agenda. Most SADC leaders instead called for more talks with Nigeria's military strongman, General Sani Abacha, in line with the Organisation of African Unity's position against sanctions.

ASEAN unity

THE ASSOCIATION of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was a step closer this week to achieving its vision of South East Asian unity during the summit meeting of ASEAN heads of state in the Thai capital, Bangkok. Leaders from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam gathered in Bangkok yesterday partly to secure commitments from Burma, Cambodia and Laos to sign an agreement to make South East Asia a nuclear-free zone. Officials from the seven ASEAN nations hope to sign a treaty to set up an ASEAN body to police intellectual-property protection in the region.

Also high on the agenda are discussions of ways of combating drug trafficking and cooperating on labour migration among ASEAN member-states. There are, however, fears that Indonesia's refusal to compromise on items it wanted to add to a tariff-exclusion list for the proposed ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) could hold up the agreement, the target date for which is 2003. Indonesia is ASEAN's most populous member-state with a population of 200 million.

Kazakhstan's poisoned chalice

After the fall of the Soviet Union, it was thought Kazakhstan would become the scene of a new gold and oil rush. The dream has been hard to realise, writes **Justin Keay** from Almaty

Central Asia has experienced immense self-doubt as to its political loyalties and trading allegiances since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The region has found it harder than it ever imagined to break with the legacy of 70 years of communism, to transform stagnation into sustainable economic growth and to bring inflation to heel.

Kazakhstan, the largest of the ex-Soviet republics after Russia, has been no exception in finding independence a somewhat poisoned chalice. After the break-up of the USSR, Western investors saw considerable potential in Kazakhstan. *The country is vast* — comprising an area of 2.7 million square kilometres, which is roughly the size of western Europe, with a population of 17 million, which is a slightly higher figure than that of the Netherlands. Under the firm leadership of President Nursultan Nazarbayev it was apparently moving in the right direction.

Stability seemed assured, not least because the Kazakhs had fewer gripes against the large Russian minority — representing about 38 per cent of the population — than other central Asians. The country also seemed to have a vested interest in maximising the development of its vast energy reserves and natural resources. The second largest oil producer in the former USSR, Kazakhstan was also home to over 60 per cent of the USSR's mineral resources, including large quantities of gold.

It was the possibility of exploiting these which led major oil multinationals to the country, most notably Chevron, which through its 50 per cent joint venture with the Kazakhstan government is expecting to invest about $20 billion over the next 40 years.

Yet, optimism that projects could come on stream within a short period of time were soon confounded by pipeline constraints, Russia wanting a larger take from oil exported to the West through its territory, severe equipment shortages, inevitable bureaucracy and a net emigration of the largely Russian management class which had overseen the energy sector.

There have been other crises to contend with. Last year not only marked the fourth successive year of gross domestic product contraction and rampant inflation but was, in essence, the young country's "annus horribilis". Growth was down by 25 per cent, after an average 12 per cent contraction in 1992 and 1993.

All this has developed against a background of increasing authoritarianism following President *Nazarbayev's dissolution of parliament this* spring and a referendum this summer — the validity of which is contested — that gave him more than 90 per cent of the votes. Since this poll, the president has had full executive powers, while the opposition remains weak and fragmented.

Observers have suggested that not only is Kazakhstan moving away from democracy but, after the cancellation of food subsidies a year ago, it is running the risk of widespread social unrest.

Yet perhaps the country's biggest short-term problem is the decline in its popularity in the eyes of Western investors. Michael Heseltine, Britain's deputy prime minister and former president of the Board of Trade, echoed this at a recent high-level conference at London's Confederation of British Industry. Departing from the diplomatic niceties that usually dominate speeches on such occasions, he indicated that business enthusiasm towards Kazakhstan, in abundance a year ago, had been replaced by a more "realistic, cautious approach".

According to figures prepared by PlanEcon, a US-based research institute, production of oil and gas in Kazakhstan plummeted in 1994, the latter by 35 per cent after an 18 per cent decline in 1993.

Total oil output in 1993 was only 460,000 barrels per day, putting Kazakhstan among the also-rans of oil producers, especially considering that its oil reserves are estimated at 19 billion barrels in the north Caspian *oil basin and about 9.5 billion barrels in the* Tengiz field currently being developed by Chevron.

Heading a high-level Kazakh delegation to London recently, first Vice-Premier Nigmetzhan Ishingarin, who along with President Nazarbayev is the only survivor of the Soviet ruling elite, admitted that his country had been through difficult times, but emphasised that the situation was improving. He stressed that since the accession of the new government Kazakhstan had created a workable regulatory and investment environment, with 30 laws passed in the last three months compared with only two passed by the previous government. The new leadership has kick-started the privatisation process and has generally done what it can to make up for lost time, he added.

"Parliamentarianism has proceeded in Kazakhstan with great difficulty. Our politicians have not been responsible," the vice-premier explained, pointing out that the previous government had been intent on extending soft loans to money-losing enterprises and had been dragging its feet over key areas of the reform programme, including the fight against inflation, tackling the problems of indebtedness of Kazakh enterprises and bolstering the tenge, the Kazakh currency.

According to Ishingarin, current priorities include passing new laws on private property and land ownership, and developing the country's relations with Western countries as well as with Japan and South Korea with which Kazakhstan would like to do more business. And, referring to Russia, Ishingarin said, "I don't see any reason to set aside more than 300 years of close, friendly relations with our neighbour." He stressed that he wanted to see improved trade relations with China, Kazakhstan's other large neighbour. He noted *that although the two had a 1,700km-long border,* Kazakhstan last year had provided only 0.15 per cent of China's imports.

A glance at the score sheet confirms that the new government has registered some success. Inflation seems to be under control. Last June the monthly rate was 2.7 per cent against a high of almost 46 per cent in June 1994, which brings the December monthly target of one per cent within reach. Also, the privatisation process seems to have come on line after several months of inaction. Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin is moving ahead on three fronts, hoping to conclude privatisation of small businesses (about 1,500 shops, restaurants and the like were sold in the first half of 1995, against 2,400 during 1994), speed the sale of large-scale individual projects (hitherto the sale of Almaty tobacco to Philip Morris is the only one to be concluded), and speed mass privatisation.

New tax laws, which came into force on 1 July, *should bring relief* to foreign investors in that they will make development and production costs tax deductible and will sweep away whole layers of separate taxes and reduce many others, including income tax, from 60 to 40 per cent. President Nazarbayev is also keen to pass other legislation blocked by the old parliament, including laws on making Russian the official second language, extending property rights and allowing private ownership of land. "It is our intention to hold elections by the end of the year, by which time the current uncertainty should have cleared," he declared recently.

"A presidential republic is our preferred option," Vice-Premier Ishingarin said. Yet, whether all this will be enough to alleviate Western concern about Kazakhstan's hitherto squandered potential and its drift towards authoritarianism is another matter. The concern voiced recently by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's vice-presiden, Ron Freeman, about Central Asia's increasingly ambivalent attitude to democracy was a case in point. Although authoritarianism may provide a more predictable environment in which to do business, and despite the magnet-like appeal of the country's energy potential which has had everybody from British Gas to Italy's AGIP queuing up, the present uncertainty is clearly making many investors think twice.

Nazarbayev and Ishingarin's apparent non-stop tour of Western and Asiatic capitals to drum up investment and support suggests that the risk of the West turning its back on the country is quite real. Clearly there is growing recognition within Kazakhstan that a combination of disappointment abroad at the country's progress so far and the greater attractiveness of markets further to the east represents a potentially lethal threat to its direct foreign investment prospects.

Ishingarin insists that the current period is transitional and is mainly to initiate the reform process. By the year's end much of the uncertainty will have cleared and the future will look much brighter. Observers agree, arguing that it is important to keep the country's problems, and its opportunities, in perspective.

Dr Edmund Herzig of the Royal Institute of International Affairs argued that many Western firms had *unrealistic* expectations about the country after its independence.

Herzig points out that, because the West is eager to find sources of energy outside the crisis-prone Middle East region, oil companies will continue to push to develop Kazakhstan's hitherto untapped potential. But given logistical and other problems it will not happen overnight. For example, Chevron has started negotiating with Iran for the construction of a pipeline to export Kazakhstan's oil instead of using the Russian pipelines.

While President Nazarbayev struggles to boost the economy without sacrificing stability, investors and traders already disappointed by the absence of gold at the end of the Almaty rainbow will continue to be frustrated by Kazakhstan's delayed renaissance.

(WNL)



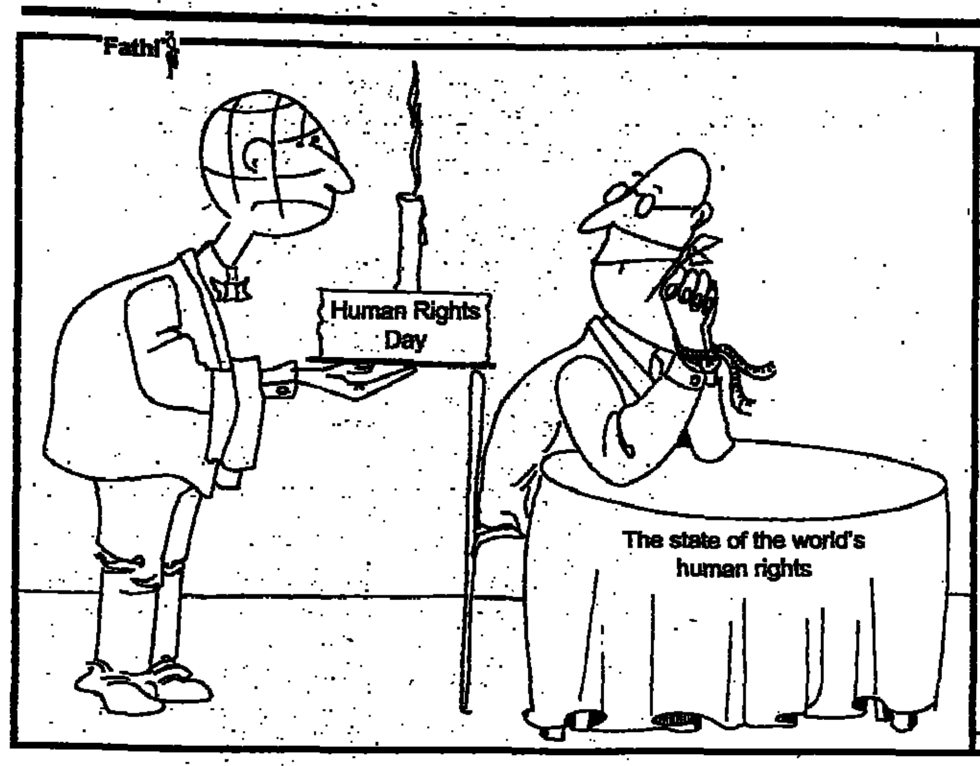
Belaya Vezha blues

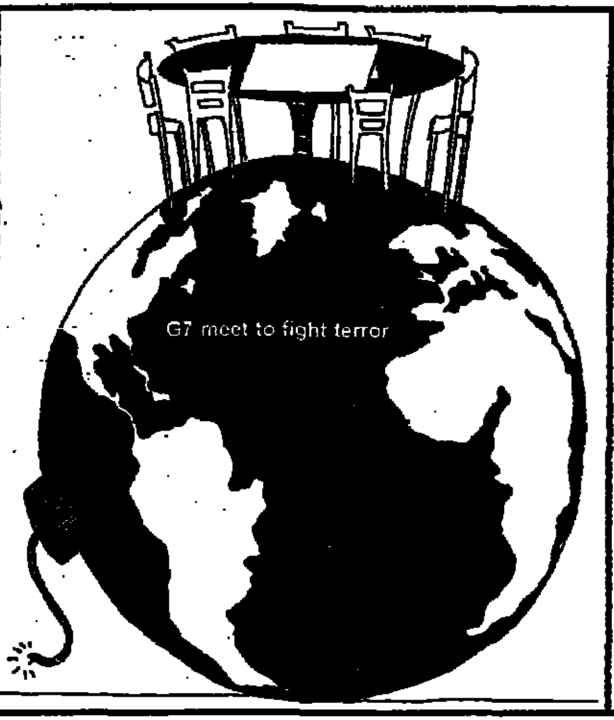
AN ELDERLY communist (left) holds a portrait of Joseph Stalin in Moscow. About 800 communists held a rally outside the Kremlin to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the Belaya Vezha agreements on dissolving the Soviet Union and creating the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Kazakhstan, one of the most economically viable and strategically *important of the newly* independent states, held legislative elections this week. Candidates belonging to parties broadly supporting Kazakh President Nusultan Nazarbayev are expected to win most of the seats. The opposition Socialist Party, which claims 40,000 members, boycotted the ballot along with Kazakh nationalist movements. Meanwhile, the electoral commission banned most pan-Russian groups from fielding candidates.

Kazakhstan has an ethnic Russian minority of 36 per cent, while some 44 per cent of the country's population are ethnic Kazakhs. President Nazarbayev hoped that elections in Russia scheduled for 17 December would "assure stability in [our giant neighbour] so that we will have stability in Kazakhstan". *(photo:AP)*

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**







Former Korean President Roh Tae Woo amassed $650 million between 1988 and 1993

Can Kim be Kohl?

There are two Koreas and four Kims who count. Only one Kim could copy what Kohl pulled off in Germany, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

A flurry of activity connected with Korea took Cairo by storm this week. A three-day seminar on Korea was convened at Cairo University's newly founded Asian Studies Department and a one-day workshop on the peace process in the Middle East and the Korean peninsula was held earlier in the week.

The *workshop of 10 December tackled the question* of Korean unification. The Koreans were interested to learn more about the Middle East peace process and how it compares with steps currently being taken to ensure peace in the Korean peninsula.

Ambassador Sayed Abu Zeid, assistant minister for Asian affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spoke about "Egyptian perspectives on the Middle East peace process and the arms control approach". Dr Abdel-Moneim Said, director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, tackled the issue from an Arab perspective. "There is much that Korea can learn from Egypt's experience in negotiations," Abu Zeid said. He pointed out that it was high time that Egypt looked eastward to the economic dynamos of Asia.

Dr Mustafa Khalil, deputy chief of the National Democratic Party and chairman of the Arab International Bank, agreed, stressing that Egypt had now been called upon to encourage dialogue between North and South Korea. Ambassador Osama El-Ashiry, director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Japan and two Koreas' desk, stressed that the sensitivities of the situation had to be taken into consideration.

Next came a passionate intervention by Selim Rizkallah, undersecretary of state and presidential advisor, who had just returned from a visit to Korea. "South Korea cannot afford to make mistakes," he said. "The country is surrounded by giants."

Dr Mohamed Selim, director of the Asian Studies Centre at Cairo University, delivered a revealing *statistical bombshell. "It was only in 1992 that the* very first article on Korean unification was published in Egypt," he disclosed. In fact, one of the first articles on Korea to appear in an Egyptian journal was written by the present United Nations secretary-general, Boutros Ghali, in 1961. "It dealt specifically with the legal aspects of Korea's unification," Selim said.

Professor Byung-Hwa Lyou of the Faculty of Law, University of Korea, talked about the legal side of the political divisions of the Korean peninsula. "After the 1950-53 Korean war, the division of the Korean peninsula was consolidated along a new military demarcation line. But it was very clear from the outset that the demarcation line was merely a military one. It was not a national boundary between two separate states under international law," he said. "The border between North and South Korea is the most heavily armed and manned demarcation line worldwide. There are 1.5 million soldiers deployed there," said Cairo Ambassador Tae-Ik Chung of the Republic of Korea (South Korea).

The keynote speech by Chung, entitled "New dimension of Korea's external policy", said, "Our external policy has been focused on our relations with four powers, namely the United States, Japan, China and Russia. And it was largely in connection with our diplomatic competition with North Korea that we attached importance to our ties with other developing countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Considering our growing economic capability, we are determined, as a newly industrialised country, to fulfill our role as a bridge between the developed and developing nations." It is in this context that political developments in the South matter to the rest of the developing world.

Militarymen-turned-politicians have traditionally prevaricated to tighten their grip on power the world over. Their prevarication has only hastened their fall from grace and loss of power. Korea has been no exception to the rule. At one point the equation in the public mind appeared to be "government equals lies and repression". Authoritarian rule, the corrupt generals asserted, was necessary to accelerate economic growth. Sooner or later, a Korean president had to put the record straight — or *the people would have had to take matters into their* own hands.

Figures recently released by the US Department of Agriculture reveal that Korea ranked first among countries importing beef from the US in terms of import growth rate. Imported beef worth some $492.5 million now meets more than half the Korean demand. Yet the West continues to see Korea as one of the most protected and nationalistic markets.

South Koreans naturally want to taste the fruits of their labour. With a buoyant growth rate of 7.7 per cent forecast for 1996, South Korea can afford to put its political establishment in a muddle. While joining the ranks of the "fat cats" may have substantially improved the military strongmen's lifestyles, it did nothing to endear them to the masses. And that leaves us with the "Dear Leader" as Kim Jong-Il is popularly called in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital.

Just as reform was inevitable in the South, so change is inescapable in the North. Ironically, the South Korean system had to give way before the North Korean system follows suit. This is why Korea and Germany are poles apart. This is why President Kim Young Sam of South Korea is no Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Relatively speaking, Kohl's task in unifying Germany was a piece of cake. Kim's is likely to be a laborious process. Still, Korean unification is the determining factor in the divided peninsula's politics.

Never have the fortunes of the two countries been so glaringly different. Even Cuba's President Fidel Castro avoided venturing anywhere near North Korea during his visit to the communist countries of Asia last week. He visited the Vietnamese capital Hanoi and Chinese capital Beijing. Castro even stopped over in the Japanese capital Tokyo for a two-day visit, but not Pyongyang.

The South's President Kim is risking political popularity by waging a war against the protectionist consensus in Korea, deregulating the economy and dismantling capital controls. He has been pushing for increased financial liberalisation, thereby lifting barriers against greater foreign competition in Korea's booming financial industry.

President Kim has indeed been presiding over an economic and *political revolution in South Korea.* He has spearheaded the campaign to investigate the politico-military establishment even though he himself is hemmed in by incriminating corruption charges. General Chun Doo Hwan, a former Korean president, was arrested last week for masterminding the 1980 military crackdown on students and workers in the southern city of Kwangju. The Kwangju massacre, claiming 200 lives, is an ugly blotch on the country's otherwise impressive social and economic achievements. Similarly, Roh Tae Woo was imprisoned in connection with corruption charges during his presidency. Roh was indicted this week for stashing away some $650 million from a public fund. The Korean public does not accept everything that their elected representatives tell them — a problem that has come to plague many nations of the South and North alike. The prosecution of former presidents is an indictment of the people's verdict on their elected representatives. South Korean prosecutors are probing into charges of financial misconduct by several business tycoons and hangers-on of the general-turned-president.

The ruling Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) has had to change its name to the New Korea Party in a desperate bid to rid itself of the stigmatised Roh and Chun legacies. Chun went on hunger strike last week in jail. He and his wife have been living in internal exile to atone for their sins. His humiliating incarceration was a gruelling lesson to all the former generals-turned-presidents.

There are those, however, who see President Kim Young Sam's crusade to end corruption in high places as tantamount to sowing the seeds of sedition. Two other Kims — Kim Jong-Pil and Kim Dae-Jung — have called President Kim's moves "retroactive" and "unconstitutional".

A country where free presidential elections were first permitted only in 1992, South Korea has attracted the attention of other developing nations of the South, not only because of its ever-prospering economic miracle, but also more recently, because of its radical programmes of political reform.

There are rumours that even the North's Kim Jong-Il — the anointed successor of North Korea's late leader Kim Il Sung — is gravely concerned over the turn of events in the South. But then the prosperous *South wants to make a break with its* authoritarian past. The economically bankrupt North is unwilling, or incapable, of doing so. To embark on such a venture would risk collapse, East German-style, and being dumped into the dustbin of history. Some deal will have to be clinched to end the peninsula's division.

Declarations of peace

By Ervin Hladnik-Milharcic

During the three years of covering the war in Bosnia, I often wondered whether war was really the subject of my writing. Even though cities were ablaze and people were dying by the thousands, war between Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and the United Nations was never declared.

The columns of white armoured personnel carriers and the rumble of jet fighters were called a peace operation; the feeding of the armies with thousands of metric tonnes of food was called a humanitarian peace effort. While various opposing armies were eating food out of tins with the same humanitarian labels during the lull in the battles, most of the political talks were about preserving peace.

The international peacekeepers came to Sarajevo by mistake. The UN, in a stroke of geniality, decided to establish the headquarters for their peace operation in Croatia in Sarajevo, the capital of the neighbouring republic of Bosnia. Convinced that war would never break out in Bosnia, they tried to restore peace from the most exposed glass building in the city. What political analysis was behind their decision never became quite clear. To the question of what exactly was going on in Bosnia, the usual answer was not war but "a blundered peace operation". And blundered it was.

The preoccupation with the fate of the peacekeepers was so intense that the reason for their being there sometimes became obscure. Behind the peace operation there was a war going on. And if the intrigues of the peace operation were at times incomprehensible, the reason for the undeclared war was evident. An internationally recognised, independent, unarmed and politically confused state was fighting against its two neighbours for the preservation of its borders. Borders and the integrity of states are what wars are usually about.

Now that the peacekeepers are selling their equipment in Zagreb and a new peace-enforcing force is coming to Bosnia, I asked the editor of the local radio station in Mostar, Faruk Kajtaz, to sum up the score.

"We are heading towards the definitive division of the country," was his reply. "In the next year the reorganised battle lines will become proper borders and NATO will secure them."

"And what happens when they go away?"

"Instead of one state you will have three."

During the spectacular peace operation, a war was fought and lost. One longs for the formality and clearness of wars in former times.

When the opportunity to declare war on Japan finally landed on the desk of the British prime minister, he wrote a letter to the Japanese ambassador in which he informed him that "a state of war exists between our two countries". He signed off with a very cordial phrase: "I have the honour to be, with high consideration, Sir, Your obedient servant, Winston S Churchill." To the various circles that reproached him that he had overdone it, he replied that "after all, *when you have to kill a man it costs nothing to* be polite".

What is valid for men can also be applied to states. The only difference is that, when a state of war is declared, states have a good chance of surviving. When a state of peace is declared, the chances of state survival become meagre.

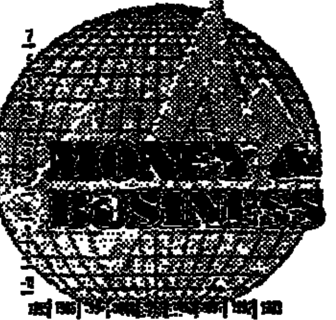
German unemployment exceeds expected rate

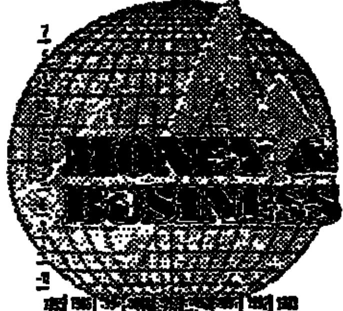
THE GERMAN Labour Force Bureau announced that the number of unemployed in Germany has surged for the fourth month *in a row, reaching 3.7 million in November. Statistics* show this rate to be much worse than what economists had previously predicted.

The report indicated that the number of unemployed in west Germany rose by 23,000 and in east Germany by 19,000.

The current number of unemployed in west Germany is 2.62 million, and 1.1 million in east Germany.







Devaluation in Venezuela

DESPITE attempts to maintain a policy that would stabilise the Venezuelan bolivar, the government has announced that the currency will be devalued by 41.4 per cent. The decision was announced by the country's finance minister last Monday, after a cabinet meeting held in the presidential palace. The rate of the bolivar is currently 290 bolivars to the US dollar. There is yet no information as to when the devaluation will take place.

NBE's role in developing the new tourist areas

IN LINE with its leading role in stimulating Egypt's development process, the National Bank of Egypt has sought to give an impetus to tourist development, given its pivotal contribution to raising the national income and creating new job opportunities. Accordingly, a contract has been concluded between the Ministry of Tourism (represented in the General Authority for Tourist Development) and the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) representing several financial institutions and a host of *prime investors and businessmen. The contract* provides for establishing a giant tourist project in Sahl Hashish on the Red Sea coast. NBE's participation in this project totals 10 per cent of its total costs estimated at LE350mn.

Moreover, 30 per cent of the project's capital will be offered for public subscription within two months at a price of LE100 per share, with a view to expanding ownership base and giving the people the opportunity to participate in this pioneer developmental project.

Equipped with natural elements of attraction and a bewitching environment, the region of Sahl Hashish occupies a unique position on Egypt's tourist development map. It lies 20km south of Hurghada, covering an area of 32 million square metres on a coast extending to 12km. The projected absorption capacity for the said project totals 12 thousand rooms with total investment cost of LE3bn.

The first phase of the project is envisaged to be completed within five years. Moreover, the project will provide the Sahl Hashish region with public utilities including networks of water, electricity, drainage, roads, means of communication and gardens in addition to commercial, entertainment and service centres as well as sport fields. The project is also planned to provide houses for its staff..

Management strategies in Amoco workshop

AMOCO Egypt Oil Company is sponsoring a series of strategic planning workshops for public sector companies, holding/affiliated companies and non-governmental organisations. This series will begin *by two workshops from 11-19* December. Sixty top and mid-level managers and senior officials will spend three and a half days to explore and develop new strategies for the management and operations *planning* for their respective institutions.

The purpose of the workshop is to assist participants in developing analytical tools for evaluating their current management strategies and *look at creative ways for future development.* Theories of strategic planning will be discussed as well as examples of models and case studies to support these the*ories. This interactive seminar* will allow participants to develop operations and management plans.

The workshop will be conducted by an American consultant with extensive experience in project management, strategic planning and organisational development. A follow-up activity will be held two weeks after the conclusion of the workshops. Participants will *be requested to share their* reflections and discuss how their workshop experiences have touched on their professional environment. An Egyptian consultant will lead the follow-up discussion.

Amoco Egypt Oil Company is funding all costs related to the workshop on strategic planning. The bi-national Fulbright organisation is organising the workshops on behalf of Amoco.

The programme will be evaluated to assess the effectiveness of topics discussed. Feedback will be sought from participants, and will be incorporated in next *year's series.*

Amoco Egypt Oil Company has operated in partnership with the Egyptian government and the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation for 32 years. As the country's larg*est oil producer, this success*ful joint venture has resulted in the production of more than 3 billion barrels of crude oil. Amoco is looking for more success in Egypt into the 21st century, and is actively pur*suing more opportunities,* with special emphasis on the discovery and development of gas, in parallel with the continuous development and exploitation of its oil fields.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Words, words, words

Overwhelmed with optimism, Bill Clinton sped to the telephone after meeting with Shimon Peres on Monday, and relayed the good news to Syria's Assad: Israel is committed to embracing a regional and global approach to securing peace. Striking while the iron's still hot, Clinton jetted Secretary of State Christopher from Paris to Damascus to brief Assad on the content of the meeting, and try to kick-start the long-stalled Syrian-Israeli negotiations.

But in his haste to complete his mission, Christopher may find that, upon arriving, he has little of substance to say. The only immediately obvious outcome of the meeting between Clinton and Peres was, in Clinton's words, that while "great hurdles have yet to be overcome... the atmosphere is better than it was before."

Assad, however, may beg to differ. Although he is "committed to doing his best to move the peace process forward", this does not mean that Syria will forgo its territorial rights or those principles falling within the purview of its national interests. Syria, along with Lebanon, on Monday rejected an Israeli request to place early warning stations in Lebanon. It has also repeatedly rejected similar efforts by Israel to house such systems in the Golan Heights. In fact, on Monday, Syria made it decidedly clear, again, that Israel must commit itself to withdrawal from the Golan Heights for peace to materialise. Peres, however, has refused to offer the necessary assurance, arguing that territorial disputes are one of the many issues to be addressed, and hopefully resolved, by the joint Israeli-Syrian work groups that may be born of his meeting with Clinton.

But, on the same day, Israeli Housing Minister Benyamin Ben Eliezer announced that 100 extra homes for settlers are to be built in the main Golan Heights settlement of Kaztrin. These kinds of actions speak much louder than Peres's words, and cast a shadow of doubt about Israel's real willingness to be flexible, or to commit to peace. If Israel refuses to back down from its stance on the Golan, then these upbeat words will amount to little more than gilt dreams and peace postponed.

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Cyprus	75 Cents	Qatar	4.0 Riyals
Denmark	12 Kroner	Saudi Arabia	4.0 Rials
France	8 F.F	South Africa	10 Rand
Germany	DM3.0	Switzerland	S.F 2.0
Greece	Dr.300	Syria	20SL
Holland	F12.50	Tunisia	800Mills
Hungary	40 Cents	Turkey	TL35000
Italy	IL2000	UAE	4 Dirhams
Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals

Untying the knot

Radical legislative reform must be the first priority of the new People's Assembly, insists **Ibrahim Nafie**



If the new assembly — despite all that has been written — succeeds in untangling the complicated knots of existing legislation, then its achievements will go down in history.

Every day we read something, somewhere, about economic liberalisation. We speak endlessly about ways of attracting Egyptian capital held abroad, of providing an atmosphere conducive to increased production, of facilitating the growth of exports, of creating jobs, particularly for the young, of cutting the red tape that inhibits growth. In short, we spend a great deal of our time talking about how the quality of life for ordinary Egyptians can be enhanced.

But how can we ever hope to do this when all our energy is taken up negotiating endless red tape?

There are 62,000 individual pieces of legislation currently on the statute books while most advanced industrialised countries have three to four thousand items of legislation. The situation is further compounded by the fact that some legislation dates back to the 1820s. Even if unused, such legislation is technically still enforceable. Laws that have been abrogated have an unfortunate tendency to return in revised forms, with anything up to one hundred appendices.

Until recently there was no attempt to comprehensively list these various amendments, enacted since 1827. But in 1987 the Cabinet Information, Decision and Support Centre (IDSC) undertook this task and finally completed a data base in 1989. Their survey revealed not only legislation amended after it had been abrogated by presidential or other decree, but also legislation that had been abrogated several times. There is an even more complicated category of legislation revealed by the survey — laws that have been amended following *their abrogation, and then abrogated* following their amendment.

The haphazard nature of our statute books means that many judges make rulings on the basis of laws that are no longer in force. To follow the various amendments and abrogations, without the necessary data base is, after all, a superhuman task. If anything is certain about this situation, it is that it causes unnecessary hardships. Judges and plaintiffs suffer in equal measure, and court proceedings advance at a snail's pace. More importantly, perhaps, this sea of legislative anomalies has led to the virtual paralysis of many aspects of our economic and social life. The contradiction between existing laws and the liberalisation of the economy means nothing gets done.

Social and economic development is inextricably bound up with the legislative programme. In Egypt each phase of the nation's modern history has been mirrored in its contemporary legislative programme. The Egyptian legislator, however, seems to have favoured the amending of existing legislation rather than its replacement. And this, in turn, has led to the accumulation of conflicting and contradictory legal articles.

It is time to take stock and examine the aims supposedly served by the vast number of laws that remain on *the statute books. Egypt, in the process* of facilitating the liberalisation of its economy, is obviously in need of legislation that promotes, rather than hinders, the opening of the market, and that encourages competition and free trade. Any number of studies, conducted by Egyptian economists, are replete with recommendations designed to facilitate social and economic liberalisation. If we are serious in our attempts at liberalisation, these recommendations, which outline the philosophical basis of such liberalisation, deserve serious consideration.

Leaving economic activity open to the forces of the market implies allowing market forces to effect changes in the service and commodity sectors. This obviously has implications for the production process. It also implies a reduction in the role of the state across the entire economic spectrum, with direct state intervention being kept to a minimum, which in turn necessitates abolishing a large number of institutions and organisations whose sole purpose is to supervise and direct such interventions.

Licensing procedures necessary for production and investment programmes must also be abolished, except where these are designed to protect the consumer, or restrict *monopolistic practices.*

Barriers to the free movement of trade and obstacles in the way of the exercise of market forces must all be removed. Restrictions on the movement of capital, commodities and services must be eradicated, while intervention in the labour market, whether in the form of supervision, regulation or wage fixing, must be ended. Furthermore, the abolition of any restrictions on the free movement of labour is imperative if labour is ever to be able to respond to the operation of a free market.

It should be apparent by now that what is needed is not just the overhaul of a few existing pieces of legislation but a radical legislative programme that will end all contradictions between the avowed end — ie liberalisation — on the one hand, and the contents of the statute books on the other. This is not going to be an easy task but nor will it prove impossible if we summon sufficient resolve.

The issuing of a single law requires intensive preparation. It is a time consuming business. So how will we ever find the time to revise the 62,000 legislative items already on the statute books, so that they can be reduced to the three of four thousand that are really necessary?

Of course, if we start from the very beginning, examining *every* single piece of the 62,000 items that need to be examined, the task would take an eternity. But any new pieces of legislation, if they take account of the specific situation and the tasks ahead of us here and now, will automatically render scores of earlier precedents redundant. This is the way to untangle the impossible knot.

The most important task we face at the present is to create an atmosphere conducive to economic development. This requires that we do all in our power to facilitate increases in production, investment and exports. We are, then, bound by an obligation to formulate modern, flexible laws that will enable us to proceed along the path of economic development.

In his address to the new parliament on Saturday, President Mubarak will no doubt emphasise the legislative tasks facing the assembly. In my opinion legislative reform is the main preoccupation of the president at the present stage, for such reform is inextricably linked to the task of effecting economic development and consolidating its benefits.

It is no secret that the president charged Atef Ebeid, Minister of Administrative Reform, and the IDSC, with compiling a comprehensive study of all current legislation, with the intention of formulating the framework for a programme of national legislative reform.

In fulfilling its tasks the IDSC, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, has already completed a study of legislation extant since 1827. A consultative committee composed of representatives from the Ministry of Justice and the IDSC has divided existing legislation into seven domains, and compiled a list of priorities, detailing which laws, in which domain, need urgent action. A timetable for legislative reform is now required.

It was the consultative committee that exposed the legal anomalies outlined above. If the People's Assembly can eliminate such anomalies already identified, then it will have earned the gratitude of the nation, since any improvements in productivity, in investment — indeed, any hope of raising standards of living, are dependent on their eradication.

Will the new People's Assembly prove able to rise to the task ahead of it? This is the question of the moment.

Politics versus violence

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed deplores the violence that marred the elections and blames it on the absence of a political culture in Egyptian political life

The elections have left deep wounds that will not heal easily. Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi admitted there were negative aspects, due, in his words, to excesses and clashes triggered by factionalism and cliquism. When the man in charge of the elections concedes that they were marred by excesses, he is committing himself — and the state — to investigate these excesses. Indeed, with over forty people killed and hundreds wounded, an investigation seems unavoidable if the new Assembly is to counter the charges of illegitimacy now being levelled against it. Unless these charges are laid to rest, they can seriously undermine the Assembly's effectiveness at a time Egypt's political institutions must enjoy full confidence if they are to face the many challenges ahead. Two challenges in particular cannot be ignored: first, the coming to a head of the peace process over the next five years, the term of the current Assembly; and, second, terrorism which, in the few weeks leading up to the elections, struck at the main actors in the region, with the assassination of the Israeli prime minister and the bomb attacks against the US military headquarters in Riyadh and the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad.

It is hard to explain how, after claiming so many victims, the electoral battle ended in such a sweeping victory for one party. No one can believe that these casualties were the result of confrontations between one party which won over 90 percent of the votes and fourteen opposition parties which together managed to win only 14 seats! They are seen, rather, as reflecting vicious infighting among the candidates of the National Democratic Party (NDP) itself, or among its candidates and defectors from the NDP who ran as 'independents' when not nominated by the party and who, on being elected, returned to its ranks. A house divided against itself can hardly claim to be a coherent political institution capable of coping with the coming challenges.

It is also hard to justify the nearly total absence of an Islamic component from the new parliament. Only one of over a hundred members of the still illegal Muslim Brotherhood who ran as independents was elected, while none of the legal pro-Islamist Labour Party candidates made it to parliament, despite the fact that its president, Ibrahim Shoukri, was leader of the parliamentary opposition in the last Assembly not boycotted by his party. The government claims that the sentences passed only days before the elections against a number of prominent Muslim Brothers accused of secretly reconstituting the Brotherhood organisation had nothing to do with the elections, a claim that is disproved by the arrest of dozens of rank and file Brothers on the eve of the elections. The fact that the entire Islamic trend, including its moderate elements who condemn terrorism and commit themselves to working through legitimate channels, is not represented in parliament, threatens to undermine the state's policy of isolating religious extremists who resort to terrorism.

Equally inexplicable is the total absence of Copts from the NDP lists. Ironically, it was the Muslim Brothers who raised the slogan calling for the election of Copts. Does the decision to bar religious parties from the new Assembly justify barring Copts as Egyptians enjoying equal rights under the constitution? President Mubarak has tried to ensure Coptic representation by using his prerogative to appoint ten deputies to parliament, but as Pope Shenouda noted in an interview with *Al-Ahaly* on the morning of the first round, a parliament without elected members of the Coptic community is a sad reflection on the state of national unity.

There is no denying that during the many years Egypt lived with a legislative assembly constituted by one political organisation only, great achievements, such as the High Dam and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, were accomplished. But there is no denying too that those years witnessed the most devastating defeat Egypt suffered in its modern history, because under a one-party system all power is concentrated in the hands of one supreme leader, and the mechanisms by which critical mistakes can be avoided tend to disappear. At any rate, this period is behind us and is unlikely to return in a global context where, following the breakdown of the bipolar world system, the new frames of reference have become pluralism, democracy, human rights and, even, the right of the international community to intervene in cases of gross violation of these values by any state. It is no longer possible for any one party anywhere in the world to claim that it alone stands as the exclusive representative of all forces in society, without being called upon to substantiate its claim. Otherwise it lays itself open to charges of vote-rigging and other irregularities.

What happens in Egypt is of particular concern to the outside world, because of its centrality in the political dynamics of the Middle East, whose stability depends to a great extent on stability in Egypt. While this appreciation of Egypt's centrality is certainly gratifying for Egypt's leaders, they must be aware that it also imposes on them the obligation to sustain credibility and avoid pitfalls like the ones mentioned above. They must also be aware that the state has everything to lose *if it does* not honour its declared commitment to pluralism. When rival gangs and armed thugs are allowed to deprive the electoral battle of any political content, when the absence of politics reaches the point of marginalising the forces that symbolise pluralism in society, there is a serious problem that can only be corrected by restoring politics to its rightful place. Pope Shenouda recently observed that the state can establish the democratic rules by which Copts can win in elections, exactly as it has ensured the success of workers and peasants, meaning that as a quota is fixed for the workers and peasants so too a quota should be fixed for the Copts. It should be remembered that the allocation of a fixed quota was proposed when the 1923 Constitution was drawn up, and categorically refused by the Copts at the time.

The state would be strongly supported if it decided to restore to politics its primacy. An assertion of its political will to have the judiciary assume its responsibilities and thoroughly investigate the irregularities committed throughout the recent election campaign would satisfy a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for the revival of pluralism. The state could further assert its commitment to pluralism by abrogating the recent law curtailing press freedoms. Promoting politics and reducing violence is not the battle of the opposition against the government but, rather, that of the state itself in the name of its very survival.

Another birthday

By Naguib Mahfouz

At 84, I really feel it is a little silly to plan for the future. On most birthdays people look forward to their next. At my age it becomes foolish to do so.

Looking back at my life I admit to feeling a degree of satisfaction. In all honesty I feel that I accomplished what I could, and in the right way. But the truth of the matter is that I am ready to give up the ghost! I feel satiated with life and the only thing that relieves the oppression of the days is the knowledge that they pass.

The most important thing in my life now is friendship. Without my friends the last two years would have been the most miserable of my life. As for my readers, of whom I am so proud, all I wrote was for them, and will remain for them, whether I am alive or not. But my 84 years have been a journey rich in good and bad.

People cannot resist asking what I have got from life. Well, like everyone else, I got pain and pleasure. So in a sense I can say that I have got out of life everything it is possible to get. What I am most proud of is what I received from my fellow countrymen. The sincere appreciation I received is, in my eyes, the greatest honour the world could heap on me. Their joy in my success was an unadulterated pleasure.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

Election aftermath

THE PAPERS this week were still preoccupied with the election results and the start of the new People's Assembly term. Early in the week **Ibrahim Nafie**, editor-in-chief of **Al-Ahram**, wrote an article entitled: "No to violence, blood and thuggery, yes to those who have won the people's confidence" in which he said: "The general election was a fierce contest in which all the opposition parties participated — 4,000 candidates competed using all the means at their disposal to win. The first round affected only 30 per cent of the seats while 70 per cent were left to the second round. This alone was enough to indicate that it was left to the voters to choose their candidates. If, however, some resorted to thuggery to achieve their aims, we are against such thuggery. It is our duty — government, parties and independents — to stand against violence and thuggery. Violence will never impose an opinion and its use will turn voters away to a candidate who advocates discussion of his party's programme.

> *'The general elections were a fierce contest in which all the opposition parties participated. If, however, some resorted to thuggery to achieve their aims, we are against this'*
>
> **Ibrahim Nafie**

On Friday, **Mustafa Amin** wrote in his daily column in **Al-Akhbar**: "Many voters searched for their names with the election committees but did not find them. The names of living persons disappeared and those of the dead reappeared. Confusion was rampant in transferring names from one town to the next and from one district to the next so that some felt they were playing a game of blind man's buff between the committee stations."

On Saturday, **Ibrahim Se'da**, editor-in-chief of **Akhbar El-Yom**, said in his weekly comment on page one entitled: "The *moulid* (religious festivity) has ended": "Criminal violence was the greatest hallmark of the recent election battle. It has not been witnessed by Egyptian society for the last few decades. In this battle there were dead and wounded at the hands of supporters of the various candidates.

On Sunday, **Mahfouz El-Ansari**, editor-in-chief of **Al-Gomhuria** wrote a two-column article on page one entitled: "So that it should not be a conspiracy" in which he said: "It was not a political contest to win votes. In many constituencies it turned into an armed battle in which firearms, knives and burning fluids were used."

In **October** magazine **Mahmoud Abdel Moneim Mourad** wrote an article entitled: "What would have happened had the independents won a majority?" in which he said: "The rigging of the elections or intervention on behalf of the ruling party, to which all the ministers, governors and security men belong, is the main deficiency which pervades our fledgling democracy. It is very possible in a future election battle that the independents would get together to achieve, what until now is thought impossible, a majority in People's Assembly seats. Should this happen, it would raise many constitutional and legal points. For example, who will be asked to form a cabinet of independents who do not share a common political view, and who do not form a political group which can become a new legal political party."

Al-Mussawar published a five-page feature article entitled: "Why have the opposition parties failed?" in which it said that the independent deputies (about 100) will form the true opposition to the NDP in the People's Assembly. The cover story of the magazine was entitled "The crisis of the opposition" in which editor-in-chief **Makram Mohamed Ahmed** wrote: "Party life has become all cleverness and trade with no connection to politics. We are now before something which includes the serious and the farcical. Many of these parties have become a liability to the democratic system and if we do not put guidelines to enable them to become real parties, party life will remain a quarrel in the papers, forever talking of rigging, democracy massacres and people's rights without reflecting anything real."

> *'Criminal violence was the greatest hallmark of the election battle. It was not witnessed by Egyptian society for the last few decades. In this battle, there were dead and wounded'*
>
> **Ibrahim Se'da**

In the same magazine, the satirical writer **Mahmoud El-Saadani** wrote in his last-page column: "We do not deny that there are honest leaderships in the NDP and fine upright citizens who work for Egypt's interests but where is the NDP presence in the Egyptian street? And where are the NDP cadres to challenge terrorist ideology among the masses? The only quarter fighting terrorism at present is the police and all the victims are members of that force.

"This is the truth. As for stories about the NDP sweeping the elections and monopolising the Egyptian masses, these are only good headlines to beautiful essays."

The opposition papers continued their attack on the electoral process. On Sunday **Al-Wafd** wrote a page-one editorial entitled: "Helter-skelter democracy" in which it said: "We do not know how to describe the phenomena of most of the independents running helter-skelter to join the ruling NDP. Had this happened in a democratic country, parliament would have been dissolved and the membership of *those* deputies rescinded. The government would have fallen since it means that those deputies had deceived the nation and sold the votes of those who elected them to the party they do not want".

On Sunday **Al-Ahrar** published the interview given by **Mohamed Hassanein Heikal** to Radio Monte Carlo. In this he said that he did not deem it improbable that new People's Assembly elections will be held in a year or two as the new Assembly will not be able to complete its term. Heikal also said, according to Al-Ahrar, that the possibility of change through the elections was very small indeed.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

A final recourse

In the last few years, around the world, the judiciary have played a significant role in settling political conflicts that stood in the way of consolidating democratic principles.

It is thanks to the autonomy of their judicial systems that the conditions have been created in several countries for a change of political regimes. In others, an independent judiciary has corrected the errors and shortcomings of regimes. An independent judiciary is capable of creating political upheavals by spotlighting incidents of corruption, even when these permeate to the very heart of government. Corrupt politicians can be prevented from occupying positions of importance, corrupt political organisations can be seriously weakened by the actions of the judiciary — indeed, by acting in accordance with its independence the judiciary can make a serious contribution to the stability of any nation. An independent judiciary can, in short, effect the kind of changes one would assume to be the prerogative of a coup d'état.

One need only consider events in Italy as they have unfolded over the last few years to see the truth of this. There, a small band of judges who refused to compromise their independence oversaw the downfall of several symbols of political power, figures and parties that have dominated Italian politics since the end of World War II. Those whose political reputations have been ruined by judicial findings include Andreotti, 28 times prime minister, and Craxi, president of the Socialist party. Dozens of ministers, deputies and businessmen stand accused of laundering billions of dollars of dirty money.

The Italian judiciary's complete independence from the executive authority allowed it to wage a wide-ranging campaign against corruption. It succeeded in toppling Berlusconi, the prime minister who had been elected to power after the fall of the traditional parties, by accusing him of tax evasion.

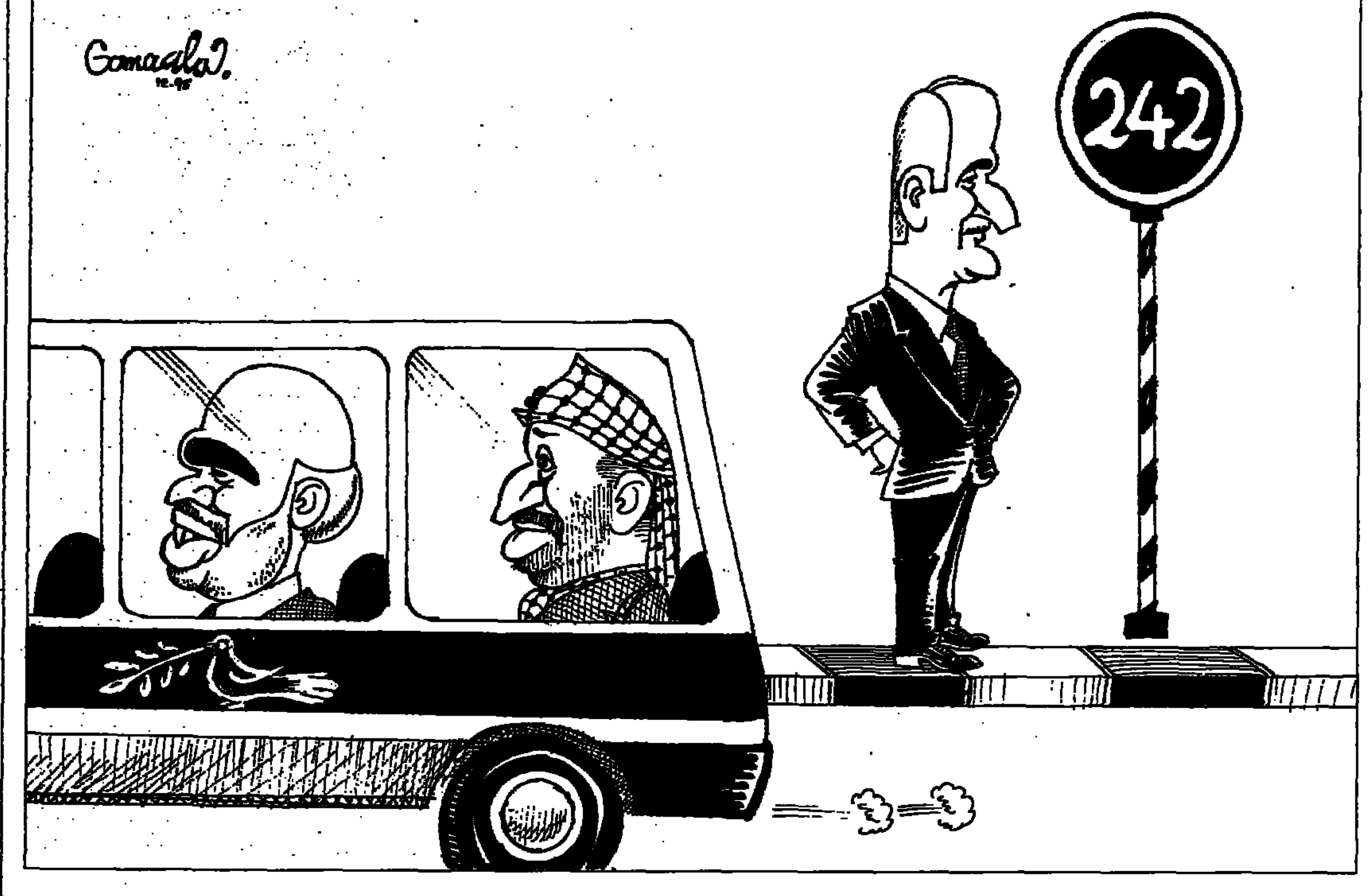
The Italian judiciary, which is still busy cleaning up Italian political life, has shown itself the only authority capable of preventing the total collapse of democracy. It has given back to the Italian people its trust in the political system.

In South Korea a similar series of events is taking place, with the trials of two former presidents. One stands accused of corruption, of having received over $600 million in bribes from the heads of seven of the largest Korean corporations, while the other is accused of ordering the murder of over 200 political opponents in 1980, when the country was ruled by a military dictatorship. This massacre proved the catalyst for the country's return to democracy.

Under the present South Korean regime, the judiciary opened its files on corruption and repression in the country, and is conducting investigations into the actions of many businessmen and politicians. The result is that Korean political life is undergoing a complete overhaul, with corrupt political and business practices being swept away so as to strengthen the democratic process.

In Egypt's recent parliamentary elections the judiciary were thrust into a symbolic supervisory role. They have escaped much of the criticism levelled at other responsible administrations, particularly in connection with inaccurate electoral registers and other incidents of irregularities.

The true role of the Egyptian judiciary — the role the judicial authorities should play under the guarantees of total independence granted by the constitution — lies in settling electoral disputes brought to its attention, and in correcting the misuse of authority when it comes to constitutional issues. Their decisions must be respected and implemented. Upholding the independence of the judiciary and maintaining its integrity and impartiality must remain a prime objective of any political system wishing to pursue democracy and political pluralism. The judiciary must retain its status as the arbiter between other authorities. The Egyptian people must retain their confidence in the judiciary as their final recourse.



Soapbox

Election post-mortem

There is a direct correlation between the degree of participation in elections and levels of education and public awareness in society at large. Despite an initially high turnout of voters — reported to be 50 per cent in the first round — by the time elections had moved into a second round this figure had been halved.

The results of the elections might have been very different had voter participation followed a different pattern. Greater participation by educated voters in urban and rural areas would surely have resulted in a differently constituted People's Assembly.

An initial examination of the final results indicates that the lowest voter turnouts were recorded in Cairo and in other large conurbations. In rural areas, where levels of illiteracy are far higher than in towns, voter turnout is consistently higher. Only 32 per cent of literate voters participate in parliamentary elections in contrast to their strong presence in professional syndicate elections, which indicates a lack of confidence, on the part of the literati, in the fairness of past elections.

The recent elections also highlighted the deficiencies in the attitude of the media, which allocated scant coverage to the opposition parties on both radio and television, while giving wide coverage to the NDP. Surely it is time that our much vaunted political pluralism be reflected in the media?

Finally, it is worth noting the low turnout of female voters. In rural areas it reached a low of 2 per cent, while in urban areas it peaked at 22 per cent. Combined with the modest number of female candidates, these figures paint a bleak picture of women's political participation. Despite being the major breadwinners in 27 per cent of families, and representing 38 per cent of the work force, women continue to feel marginal to the political process.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a professor of mass communication at Cairo University. **Awatef Abdel-Rahman**

Guns, gold and godspeak

Eqbal Ahmad charts the rise and rise of Jihad International Inc., aided by the West

When the good earth trembled in Islamabad trees shook, homes rattled, and people died. Yet I wonder whether the blast which tore the Egyptian Embassy apart has occasioned serious reflection in countries whose policies sowed the seeds of the so-called "Islamic terror".

It will please no one to hear that as a violent, world-wide movement, Jihad International Inc is a recent phenomenon — a modern, multi-national conglomerate whose founders include the governments of the US, Pakistan, some Arab countries and Israel. It was the American-sponsored anti-communist crusade in Afghanistan that revitalised, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the notion of jihad as the armed struggle of believers. Israel's invasion and occupation of Lebanon gave it meaning and added impetus.

Never before in this century has jihad assumed so pronounced an "Islamic" and international character. The twentieth was a century of secular Muslim struggles. The Ottomans fought their last wars in essentially temporal terms — in defence of a tottering empire and, at least in the Middle East, against predominantly Muslim foes. From the rise of Saad Zaghloul to the demise of Abdel-Nasser, the Egyptian national movement remained secular and explicitly Arab and Egyptian. This was equally true of the Iraqi, Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese national struggles. The Turks attained their liberation under the banner of intemperate secularism. Iranian nationalists fought and forged a Belgium-like constitution at the start of this century. In India, Muslim nationalism — opposed by an overwhelming majority of Indian *Ulema* — defined the demand and achievement of Pakistan. All these movements had some resonance among other Muslim peoples who were similarly engaged in anti-colonial struggles but none had an explicit pan-Islamic context.

Jihad, a noun meaning struggle, from the Arabic root verb *Jhd* meaning to strive, was nevertheless a favoured word among Muslims in their struggle for liberation from colonial rule. When my brother was expelled from school after raising the nationalist flag, he was welcomed in our village as a *Mujahid* or one who struggles. In the Maghreb, Algerian nationalist cadres who engaged France in an armed struggle for seven gruelling years were called *Mujahidin*, and their news organ was named *Al-Moujahid*. This newspaper was edited for a time by Franz Fanon, a non-Muslim, and the struggle was led by a secular organisation known as Front de Liberation National (FLN). In Tunisia, the national struggle was led by Habib Bourguiba, a die-hard Cartesian secularist who enjoyed, nevertheless, the title of *Al-Mujahidul-Akbar*.

The word jihad did occasionally appear as a mobilising slogan of the 1978 Iranian revolution but *Enghelab* — revolution — actually dominated as the symbol of the uprising against the Shah. After seizing power, Iran's revolutionary government adopted *Jihad-i-Sazindazi* — jihad for reconstruction — as its mobilising symbol. Without a significant exception, jihad was used during the twentieth century in a national, secular, and political context until, that is, the advent of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan.

For the first time in this century the standard bearers of a Muslim people's struggle for liberation were Islamic parties opposed to "godless communism", committed to its violent overthrow, and dedicated to the establishment of an "Islamic state" in Afghanistan. Theirs was a jihad in the classical, strictly theological sense of the word. Ironically, they had the support of Western powers as no liberation movement ever did. The US and its allies supplied the Mujahidin with an estimated $10 billion worth of arms and aid.

They also invested in this jihad the legitimacy of their enormous power, and the lustre of their media made glory. On one especially memorable occasion when the Mujahidin leaders visited the White House, President Ronald Reagan described them as the Muslim world's "moral equivalent of our founding fathers". Similarly, the American and European media played up the war in Afghanistan as the greatest story of the eighties. Foreign correspondents scanned the Hindu Kush for stories of "Mooj" heroism. Competition for jihad narrative was so great that in one instance a major network, CBS, was discovered to have paid handsomely to film a staged battle between Islam and Communism. The Western media carries greater importance and authority in the Third World; their Afghanistan war coverage made an enormous impact, especially on Muslim youth.

Within a year of the Soviet intervention, Afghanistan's war coverage was on its way to becoming a pan-Islamic jihad. Hundreds, eventually thousands, of young Muslims from places as far apart as Algeria and the Philippines, Sudan and Sinkiang travelled to Peshawar and Torkham, received training in the use of arms, and under the strict guidance of various Islamic parties became ideologically ripe and tasted more or less of the jihad-in-the-path-of-God. The US government and its vaunted intelligence agency saw in this process a Cold War opportunity to pit militant Islam against communism. Had the Soviet Union not collapsed unexpectedly, it is likely that the US would be continuing to benefit from this historic mobilisation of opportunity.

We knew about the pan-Islamic character that the Afghan war was assuming. But no country — not Algeria, not Egypt — prevented the participation of their nationals in a distant war. All watched carefully, then looked the other way until, that is, the chickens of Afghan insurgency returned home to roost. I found in 1986, for example, that Egyptian intelligence had an effective presence in Peshawar and excellent information on the demography of jihad. They were merely keeping an eye. America after all was an ally; they could not interfere with its agenda. The demands for extradition started to reach Pakistan from Algiers and Cairo only after the US had cashed in its investments in Afghanistan, and the gates of hell had broken loose in Algeria and Egypt.

The jihad's pan-Islamic dimension was a historic new phenomenon. Not since the great Crusades in the Middle Ages had jihad crossed cultural, ethnic and territorial boundaries. Pan-Islamism did emerge briefly as a movement in the nineteenth century, its banner having been raised by such ideologues as Jamal-al-Din Afghani and warriors such as Sayed Ahmed Shahid. At the climax of this pan-Islamic drive, India's Muslims launched into the Khilafat Movement to save the Ottoman Caliphate. Khilafat's leaders, the Ali brothers, did often describe their movement as a jihad. But this was a non-violent agitation supported by such non-Muslim nationalists as Mahatma Gandhi and frowned upon by Mohamed Ali Jinnah who later founded Pakistan. More to the point, it had negligible pan Islamic resonance. Arabs, Iranians, and Turks alike viewed it as a uniquely Indian phenomenon.

Pan-Islamism survived only as an abstract agenda of a microscopic minority of Muslim intellectuals. Its influence showed in the works of some modern writers and poets including Mohamed Iqbal. The generalised sentiment of Muslim affinity on which pan-Islamism relied was real nevertheless, and from time to time manifested itself in people's expressions of solidarity with co-religionists in Palestine, Bosnia etc. Yet, the national struggles of Muslim peoples remained national, and pan-Islamism endured only as an inchoate sentiment of solidarity.

By contrast, with the Afghanistan war pan-Islamism grew on a significant scale as a financial, cultural, political and military phenomenon with a world-wide network of exchange and collaboration. Myriads of institutions — *madaris*, Islamic universities, training camps, conference centres — came into being, first in Pakistan, then in other places. Sensing the enormous opportunity, traders in guns and drugs became linked to the phenomenon creating an informal but extraordinary cartel of guns, gold and godspeak.

Trans-national involvement in the Jihad not only reinforced links among Islamic groupings, it also militarised conventional main stream religious parties. Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami is a case in point. Until its engagement with Afghanistan, it was a right wing party, cadres based, intellectually oriented, and prone to debate and agitation rather than armed militancy. Today it commands, outside Pakistan's army and rangers, perhaps the largest number of battle hardened and armed veterans. In 1948-49, its chief ideologue, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi had rejected, on theological grounds, the notion of jihad in Kashmir. Today, it openly boasts of its substantive involvement there. In effect, while the US government and media blamed Iran as the source of organised Muslim rage, armed Islamic radicalism was actually nurtured in Ziaul Haq's Pakistan with American funding and the CIA's help.

By 1989, Jihad International Incorporated confronted a reversal of the American order. This sequel to the Afghan war added fuel to the gathering fire. For America not only turned its back on its erstwhile allies, it turned on them. It declared jihad a menace to mankind, financed Israel's occupation and air-raids on Mujahidin in south Lebanon, supported Algeria's military rulers' suppression of the Islamic Front's electoral victory, and isolated Sudan. Under the circumstances the battle lines had to be re-drawn.

An ill-conceived promise

What is Oslo II likely to engender? Not peace, argues **Ahmed Sidqi al-Dajjani**

From the American point of view, the Taba-Washington agreement constitutes a cornerstone in the Middle East order which the US wants to establish as a means of perpetuating its own hegemony.

The agreement pertains to a region in which many countries have important interests. Yet its American sponsors clearly insist on elbowing them out and relegating them to witness status, as they did with the UN. What effect, we are entitled to ask, will this "cornerstone of a new Middle East order" have on international parties whose interests conflict with a tightening of the American grip on the region?

The agreement has important ramifications on what is known in the West as "the Jewish question." For Jews around the world, the Zionist vision for the 21st century raises thorny issues regarding their patriotic allegiances and the nature of their relationship with the "natives" in their countries of citizenship. What alterations will the international image of Jews undergo in light of the Zionist solution to the Palestinian question, founded as it is on racial discrimination between Jews and other "natives".

To what extent will Zionist racism against the Palestinians contribute to the rise of anti-semitism abroad? Will the scope of confrontation between the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance movements and the Israeli military occupation, supported by international Zionism, broaden and to what extent will this threaten non-Zionist Jews abroad?

The agreement also has an immediate bearing on the peace process on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts and wide-ranging implications for Arab regional organisation. It enables Israel to ally autonomous Arab Palestine to its side in its dealings "with" or "against" other Arab and Islamic parties.

Israel, as the supervisor of Palestinian autonomy, is empowered to confront external threats. In particular the borders with Jordan and Egypt have to be protected, in spite of the fact that these two countries have already signed peace agreements with Israel. Palestinian autonomy, courtesy of Taba-Washington, becomes Israel's tool for fracturing the Arab and Islamic orders.

It is not difficult to draw a comparison between "transitional autonomy" and the agreements of 1951 and 1959 in South Africa that gave measures of autonomy rule to the Bantu cantonments until they were abolished with the end of apartheid in 1994. Today in Palestine, we are seeing the cantonisation of Gaza and the West Bank.

The primary objective of the 400-page long agreement is to establish "a transitional Palestinian autonomous authority" for a period not to exceed five years from the date of the signing of the Gaza-Jericho agreement on 4 May 1995.

But what, specifically, are the functions of the transitional autonomous authority as defined in the agreement?

But upon whom will the transitional Palestinian authority exercise the limited authorities transferred to it and in which part of Palestine? The articles of the second section, entitled "Redeployment and Security Arrangements" provide the answer. Article ten specifies that, in the first phase, this "covers the densely populated areas of the West Bank, with its cities, villages, refugee camps and farms." In the first appendix of the agreement this phase is defined as within three weeks (22 days) of the "council" elections whereupon a second phase follows once the "council" assumes power. Article 11 specifies the areas to be governed by the autonomous authority. It is appended with three maps, the first detailing the area in terms of demographic concentration, the second showing the distribution of government and Islamic trust (*waqf*) foundation lands, and the third highlighting the West Bank territories that will be subject to later negotiations for the final settlement. This latter category comprises Greater Jerusalem, all the Israeli settlements and the various Israeli military bases. Although a "Palestinian negotiator" announced that this compromises 67 percent of the total area of the West Bank, Shimon Peres said it was 72 per cent. In other words, for the next five years, the autonomous authority will be exercising its "powers" over 28 percent of the total land area of the West Bank.

The Taba-Washington agreement, as is stipulated in article 31, amalgamates and replaces the Gaza-Jericho agreement and all other previous agreements. As the sole document defining an emerging entity, it raises several issues that merit consideration.

The first regards "human rights and the rule of law," which is the title of article 19 in the section pertaining to legal matters. It stipulates that "Israel and the council will exercise their duties and responsibilities in accordance with this agreement and, in so doing, they will take into account the internationally recognised conventions and principles concerning human rights and the rule of law."

What audacity! Human rights is a broad concept, according to the UN definition. In addition to civil and political rights, it comprises social and economic rights as well as the right of a people to self determination. This last right alone is abrogated in a document that clearly restricts autonomy to only a segment of the population within a fragment of its territory.

The preamble of the UN declaration of human rights proclaims that all people are born with an equal claim to dignity and rights. The Taba-Washington agreement imposes so many restrictions on Palestinians that it usurps a large degree of their liberty. The numerous instances of discrimination between Palestinians and Israelis in the agreement are a flagrant breach of the declaration of human rights, which stipulates in article 13 every individual's right to the freedom of movement, choice of residence, emigration and return. Such freedom is explicitly restricted for the Palestinian people. "Safety cordons" regulate their traffic between the cities in the West Bank and between the West Bank and Gaza. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians evicted from their homes in 1967 are prevented from return. The agreement, in article 27 pertaining to "contact and cooperation with Jordan and Egypt, makes incidental reference to this latter category using the term "displaced Palestinians". The second paragraph of this article stipulates that the follow-up committee, composed of the Israeli and Palestinian representatives on the one hand and the Jordanian and Egyptian representatives on the other, shall agree upon the conditions and standards to permit "displaced person" to enter Gaza and the West Bank so as to prevent any disruption of peace and public order. Two years have passed since this paragraph was formulated in the declaration of principles. No "displaced" Palestinians have returned under its auspices.

A second consideration to ponder is how the agreement relates to food security and the prevention of starvation. Here we turn to article 24, headed "economic relations", and to the fifth appendix which contains the "Protocol for Economic Relations", signed in Paris on 29 April 1994. The preamble of the protocol registers the view of both parties that economy and commerce constitute a major cornerstone for the strengthening of their mutual interests and achieving a just and lasting comprehensive peace. Eleven articles define the scope of the protocol and the joint economic committee which is to supervise the implementation of policies regarding import taxes, currency and monetary exchange, taxes on production, labour, agricultural produce, tourism, and insurance. Related to issues of protocol are the articles in the Taba-Washington agreement regarding security. According to one paragraph, Israel retains the right to close the cross points for "considerations of peace and security." We have seen in practice how flexible "security considerations" can be. Recently they have been stretched in order to tighten the economic grip over the people in the West Bank and Gaza so that the Palestinian authority would give in to the demands of the Israeli government.

Israel still controls the movement of goods and people, and all Palestinian exports must pass through Israel where they have to be sold to Israeli brokers. For this, export fees must be paid, and goods subjected to a minute security check, with all the corollary problems of hold-ups at the border and damage to the goods. As a result, the volume of citrus fruit that would ultimately reach the export market, for example, might actually be reduced from an original 250,000 tonnes to 100,000 tonnes.

As for imports, Palestinians have to pay the Israeli port fees and frequent closure of the borders between the West Bank and Israel force Palestinian importers to pay demurrage fees to cover the delays. These impediments force them to rely on the Israeli market to provide approximately 80 percent of their primary materials.

The agreement, therefore, makes it impossible for the Palestinian authority to guarantee food security in the West Bank and Gaza. The autonomy government will remain the prisoner of donor countries and at the mercy of Israel. It has recently been agreed to create industrial zones along what is known as the 'green line' in order to solve the problem of aggravated unemployment among Palestinians. However, donor countries are sceptical. Flooding Gaza and the West Bank with products produced in these industrial zones will impede their capacity to develop local industries.

A third matter for us to consider concerns the political and legal definition of the Palestinian people. The preamble of the agreement refers to the "Palestinian people" and their legitimate rights and just demands. Then, in the section pertaining to the election, composition and jurisdiction of the "council", we find paragraph 3 of article 9, which says, "The executive decisions and actions of the council must comply with the stipulations of this agreement." Referring to the declaration of principles, this means that the council will not have the authority to conduct foreign relations and to establish embassies or consulates abroad nor any other form of foreign mission or centre. Nor can the council "permit the establishment of foreign embassies in the West Bank or Gaza, receive foreign diplomatic or consular missions or exercise diplomatic functions." The text leaves no doubt that 'autonomy' does not mean 'sovereignty' of which a major manifestation is diplomatic representation which is a principle of self-determination clarified in the Vienna agreement of 1961. At the same time, article 15 of the agreement imposes upon the council the duty to challenge the right of the Palestinian people to resist the occupation and to counter any hostile activities aimed at the occupation authorities. While the agreement explicitly has stripped the Palestinian autonomous government of any notion of sovereignty, the PLO is empowered to "conduct negotiations and sign agreements with foreign countries, donor countries and international organisations on behalf of the council over specific economic matters and for purposes related to regional development and scientific, cultural and educational advancement." It further states that offices established abroad for these purposes "will not be considered within the scope of foreign relations."

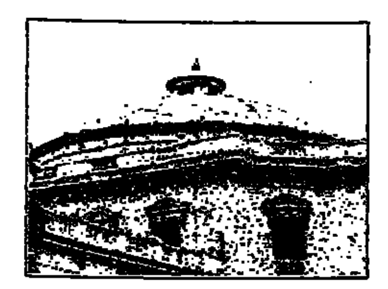
Thus, the agreement has managed to paralyse the PLO, the embodiment of the Palestinian people and their legitimate representative in the Arab League, the Islamic Conference Organisation and the United Nations. It is further paralysed on the domestic front, since, for all practical purposes, its scope of political jurisdiction is restricted to activities from which the government of Israel will derive the greatest benefit.

Human rights, rule of law, self-sufficiency, national self-determination and cultural identity. All of these have been neatly packaged into an agreement that renders these principles utterly devoid of meaning. What kind of autonomy is this? What sort of peace does it promise?

Al-Ahram Weekly

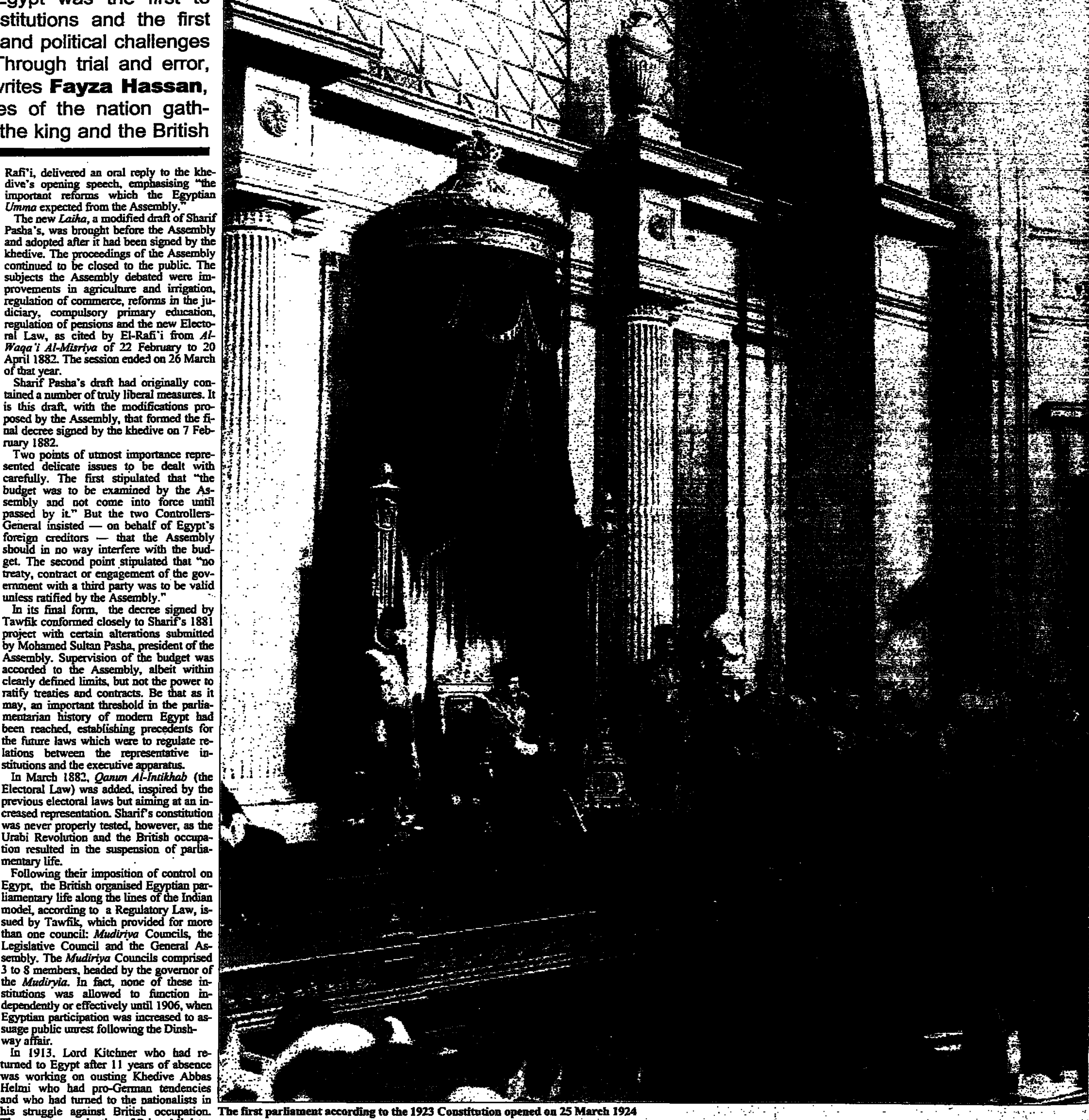
14 - 20 December 1995

On Saturday President Mubarak will address Egypt's twenty-first parliament since the 1923 Constitution. *Al-Ahram Weekly*



Housing hope

Of all the Arab nations, Egypt was the first to develop representational institutions and the first country to rise to the social and political challenges of the French Revolution. Through trial and error, repression and opposition, writes Fayza Hassan, notables and representatives of the nation gathered and spoke out against the king and the British



The first parliament according to the 1923 Constitution opened on 25 March 1924

DURING the reign of Mohamed Ali, reforms were taking place in every possible field. "Along with the need for reform came a belated awareness that an efficient control of the countryside could not be imposed from the urban centres alone," writes Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot. The collaboration of rural leaders was needed. In August 1829, the *Majlis Al-Shura* was assembled. "The *majlis*, the first of its kind, met under the presidency of Ibrahim Pasha who referred to it as his 'parliament,'" writes Marsot. The *majlis* had no legislative powers, she points out, "but it did pass a series of recommendations that became standard procedures." Mohamed Ali, according to PM Holt, was followed by rulers who had little use for advisory councils, and did little to keep up the pretence.

IN 1866, Ismail introduced an important development, the creation of a quasi-parliamentary body, the Assembly of Delegates (*Majlis Shurat Al-Nuwwab*). It consisted of 75 members, chosen by indirect election. Candidates were selected by popular vote and these "delegates of the people" would elect members to the Assembly. Only five members represented the great towns of Cairo and Alexandria while the great majority of the members were village headmen, writes Holt. The Assembly of Delegates was created by a *Règlement*, or decree. It contained two statutes, the *Laiha Asasiya*, which was the statute of foundation of the Assembly but really amounted to the first attempt at writing an Egyptian constitution, and the *Laiha Tanzimiya* (Statute of Organisation).

The first paragraph of the *Laiha* defined the powers of the Assembly, which could "deliberate on the country's internal matters" and "give an opinion" on projects which the "government deemed within the scope of the *majlis*' deliberations"; this opinion was then submitted to the approval of his Majesty the Viceroy. The Assembly had an advisory role; its suggestions would then be presented to the khedive for approval or rejection.

Its constitution and structure were clearly inspired by European practice of the time, and it imitated, often in detail, the procedures of the French Assemblée Nationale and other similar institutions.

Although Ismail's Assembly performed only an advisory function with no legislative powers, it is important to remember that Egyptian parliamentary institutions developed from these modest beginnings. Rifa'a Rafi' El-Tahtawi, in his book *Manafi' Al-Albab* (1869), praises Ismail for the introduction of the Assembly in the life of "an *Umma* of free opinion", which he was consulting on matters that concerned it. El-Tahtawi was among the few who foresaw the importance of this first Assembly of Delegates in the development of Egypt's political life.

The last Assembly under Ismail's rule convened on 2 January 1879 and lasted until July. It opened amidst public unrest caused by European threats to Egypt's autonomy. The delegates protested what became known as the European government due to the presence of a French minister of public works and a British minister of finance. The Dual Control, established to control the "Caisse de la Dette Publique" or the public debt (i.e. the debt owed by Ismail to his European creditors), was far from popular; the newspapers of the time did little to assuage the defiant mood, expressing their hopes that the Assembly would not renege on its duties to defend the rights of the *Umma*.

Ismail's address to the Assembly was brief, asking the delegates to consider financial as well as public matters. But the spirit of self-assertion had taken root in the Assembly. In their reply to the opening address, the delegates expressed clearly the "right of the Egyptian *Umma* to freedom and the right of the Assembly to participate in the formulation of decisions bearing on the future of Egypt," writes Abdel-Rahman El-Rafi'i.

Deliberations took a turn that was not favourable to the khedive; the most prominent delegates opposed a decree regarding financial matters which had been issued on 6 January 1879 without prior presentation to the Assembly. This incident prompted Ismail to take a momentous decision. On 7 April 1879, he revoked the Assembly. The delegates, however, refused to disperse without first inspecting the government's financial policy. Ismail had to bow to the wishes of the Assembly and replaced Nubar by Sharif Pasha, whose first act as prime minister was to declare that the Assembly would remain in session.

On 17 May 1879, Sharif presented to the Assembly what amounted to the second attempt at drafting a national constitution. He promised he would also present a new Electoral Law, *Laihat Al-Intikhab*. This project was not only the fruit of Sharif's efforts to increase the powers of the legislative body over the executive, it reflected the spirit of a rising nationalist movement, with membership drawn from the Egyptian officers, as well as notables and dignitaries from all over the country. A dramatic turn occurred at this juncture: Ismail was deposed in June 1879, and the years 1879 to 1882 culminated in the Urabi Revolution, the formation of a nationalist-led ministry in 1882, and the British military intervention that summer which ended with the de facto British occupation of the country in 1882.

IN THE THREE YEARS leading to the British intervention to protect the foreign interests threatened by the nationalist movement, there were attempts to ask Tawfik, Ismail's successor, to convene a new parliament along more liberal lines. Finally a petition bearing 1,600 signatures was presented to Tawfik in 1881. The Assembly of Delegates convened according to the original 1866 *Laiha Asasiya*. The decree issued on 4 October 1881, was brief: It called for new elections, fixed the date of the new inauguration of the Assembly and charged the minister of the interior with its execution.

On 2 December 1881, the new session of the Assembly was officially opened, writes Abdel-Rahman El-Rafi'i. One of the points stressed by Khedive Tawfik in his opening address was that "the delegates... in their deliberations... should always take Egypt's contracts with European powers into account." One of the delegates, recounts El-Rafi'i, delivered an oral reply to the khedive's opening speech, emphasising "the important reforms which the Egyptian *Umma* expected from the Assembly."

The new *Laiha*, a modified draft of Sharif Pasha's, was brought before the Assembly and adopted after it had been signed by the khedive. The proceedings of the Assembly continued to be closed to the public. The subjects the Assembly debated were improvements in agriculture and irrigation, regulation of commerce, reforms in the judiciary, compulsory primary education, regulation of pensions and the new Electoral Law, as cited by El-Rafi'i from *Al-Waqa'i Al-Misriya* of 22 February to 20 April 1882. The session ended on 26 March of that year.

Sharif Pasha's draft had originally contained a number of truly liberal measures. It is this draft, with the modifications proposed by the Assembly, that formed the final decree signed by the khedive on 7 February 1882.

Two points of utmost importance represented delicate issues to be dealt with carefully. The first stipulated that "the budget was to be examined by the Assembly and not come into force until passed by it." But the two Controllers-General insisted — on behalf of Egypt's foreign creditors — that the Assembly should in no way interfere with the budget. The second point stipulated that "no treaty, contract or engagement of the government with a third party was to be valid unless ratified by the Assembly."

In its final form, the decree signed by Tawfik conformed closely to Sharif's 1881 project with certain alterations submitted by Mohamed Sultan Pasha, president of the Assembly. Supervision of the budget was accorded to the Assembly, albeit within clearly defined limits, but not the power to ratify treaties and contracts. Be that as it may, an important threshold in the parliamentarian history of modern Egypt had been reached, establishing precedents for the future laws which were to regulate relations between the representative institutions and the executive apparatus.

In March 1882, *Qanun Al-Intikhab* (the Electoral Law) was added, inspired by the previous electoral laws but aiming at an increased representation. Sharif's constitution was never properly tested, however, as the Urabi Revolution and the British occupation resulted in the suspension of parliamentary life.

Following their imposition of control on Egypt, the British organised Egyptian parliamentary life along the lines of the Indian model, according to a Regulatory Law, issued by Tawfik, which provided for more than one council: *Mudiriya* Councils, the Legislative Council and the General Assembly. The *Mudiriya* Councils comprised 3 to 8 members, headed by the governor of the *Mudiryia*. In fact, none of these institutions was allowed to function independently or effectively until 1906, when Egyptian participation was increased to assuage public unrest following the Dinshway affair.

In 1913, Lord Kitchner who had returned to Egypt after 11 years of absence was working on ousting Khedive Abbas Helmi who had pro-German tendencies and who had turned to the nationalists in his struggle against British occupation. The recent assassination of Prime Minister Butros Ghali indicated a resurgence of nationalist sentiments which was worrying the British. Cromer who had a history of conflicts with the khedive advised nevertheless against the move at this particular time (the eve of World War I). Concessions would have to be made instead, to the politically conscious group: A new Legislative Assembly was created replacing the bi-cameral system and "superseding the two former bodies and with somewhat greater powers. Its most prominent member was Saad Zaghloul," writes PM Holt. This Assembly was suspended when the war was declared.

A more direct form of British rule was established in 1914 and colonial planners may have looked forward to the smooth integration of Egypt into the Empire. But the political, social and economic conditions of the country as it emerged from the war were propitious grounds for a revival of nationalist feelings which eventually produced an unprecedented popular uprising against the British.

THE 1919 REVOLUTION was the crystallisation of accumulated hatred against the occupation, the birth of a sense of identity and the resentment against the misery brought on the Egyptian people by the war in the form of requisitioning of animals and foodstuff, drafting of peasants by the hundred thousands for forced labour in the Allied armies, food shortages and raging inflation. All these factors set the stage for the people's uprising.

The year 1919 witnessed the involvement of a broad section of the population in the struggle for its independence, together with the birth of a labour movement which would become intimately linked to the nationalist movement and give Egypt's national politics its direction in the decades to come.

Historians often cite the main reason for the revolution as the arrest and exile of Saad Zaghloul. It may well have been the pretext. After an informal meeting of the Legislative Assembly which had been suspended during the war years, Saad Zaghloul together with other Egyptian nationalists formed a delegation (*wafd*) with the intent to present the case for Egypt's independence to the British Government and to the forthcoming Versailles Conference which was to convene on 18 January 1919. The *wafd* (the nucleus of the future Wafd Party) was prevented from leaving the country. With popular feelings against the British running high, Zaghloul organised a campaign to gain signatures on a petition supporting the *wafd*'s request.

On 8 March the British arrested Zaghloul and two of his followers and the next day deported them to Malta. On 9 March the first peaceful protest demonstration took place involving mainly students at first. Gradually other protesters joined in and by 10 March the demonstrators were clashing with the security forces. The following days witnessed an unprecedented escalation of popular protests which ended in bloody clashes with the British forces. Attacks against British installations and personnel were carried out simultaneously while organised strikes paralysed the country. The whole Egyptian population had united in an attempt to rid itself of British occupation. Soon the revolution spread to the countryside where the British in retaliation burned and razed entire villages. Still every day saw a new escalation of the conflict.

Unable to quell the rebellion the British backtracked. Saad Zaghloul was allowed to return. But it was too late for the British. The struggle continued, with Zaghloul and the Wafd Party at the helm, usually political but often taking the form of demonstrations, boycotts and sporadic acts of violence against the British and their collaborators.

The immediate result of the 1919 Revolution was the Declaration of Independence announcing the end of the Protectorate and the recognition of Egypt as "an independent, sovereign state." Martial Law, which had been in force since 2 November 1914, was to be terminated on the passing of the Act of Indemnity. Four matters were "absolutely reserved to the discretion" of the British government until agreements concerning them could be negotiated. These were: a) the security of the communications of the British Empire in Egypt; b) the defence of Egypt against all foreign aggression direct or indirect; c) the protection of foreign interests in Egypt and the protection of minorities; d) the question of the Sudan. The first, second and last "reserved matters" were to be the subject of repeated and frustrated negotiations and the cause of much of the political unrest throughout the following thirty years.

ANOTHER RESULT was the promulgation of the 1923 Constitution drafted by a 32-member Constitutional Commission. Compromises had to be made under British pressure but in the end, Egypt was granted its first real National Constitution promulgated by royal decree on 19 April 1923. It provided for a bi-cameral system, a Senate (*Majlis Al-Shuyukh*) and a Chamber of Deputies (*Majlis Al-Nuwwab*). Half the members of the Senate were to be replaced every five years and up to 40 per cent of the senators

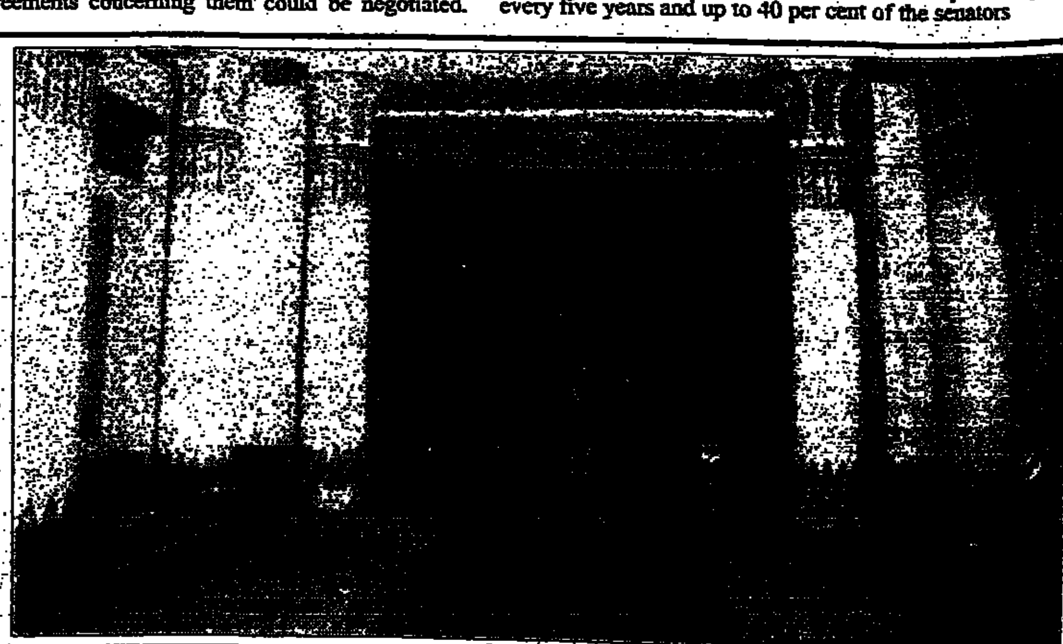
Death in parliament

THE BUILDING of the People's Assembly and the adjoining Pharaonic Lobby began in 1922. They were completed and inaugurated on the day of the opening of the first parliament as provided by the 1923 Constitution, on 25 March 1924.

The lobby later fell in disrepair and was in need of restoration. Work was carried out on the building, decoration and the furniture under the auspices of President Mubarak and completed in 1987. It was inaugurated by the president, accompanied by Rif'at El-Mahgoub, speaker of the People's Assembly, on 20 October of that year.

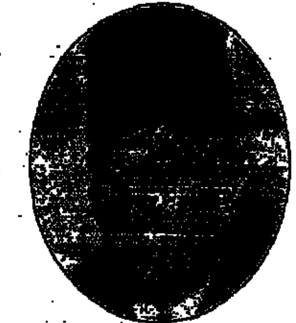
The Pharaonic Lobby, a pastiche of ancient Egyptian temple architecture, contains 24 columns, each with a capital in the form of a papyrus flower, an ancient symbol of creation. The design of the columns was copied from models found in the royal temples of the fifth dynasty, in the period of the old kingdom, at Abu Sir and Sakkara.

One of the lobby's claims to fame is that it was while crossing the floor that Prime Minister Ahmed Mahir was shot by a young lawyer in 1945. Mahir had finally decided to enter the war on the side of the allies. Al-Nahhas, in a fiery article published in *Al-Balagh*, accused Mahir of treason. As Mahir entered the lobby to deliver the speech, he was gunned down.





Al-Ahram ... reviews the varying fortunes of an institution that for many decades came to embody the struggle and aspirations of a nation







Sharif Pasha — Ismail Ragheb — Saad Zaghloul — Ahmed Mahir — Mustafa El-Nahhas — Abdel-Latif El-Baghdadi — Anwar El-Sadat — Sayed Marei — Ahmed Fathi Surour

The last parliament before the 1952 Revolution which was to open a new chapter in Egyptian history

could be nominated by the king. The deputies were *to be elected by indirect popular vote. There* would be one senator for every 180 000 citizens and one deputy for every 60,000.

The king had the right to select and appoint the prime minister and the Senate president. He also had the power to convene and dissolve parliament at his will. No decree could be passed unless passed by both chambers then signed by the king. The constitution empowered the king over parliament and for this reason, in the years to come he would abuse this privilege whenever parliament's decisions ran against his will.

Over the next few years the Egyptian Parliament weathered several crises all caused by the king's or the British's unwarranted interventions in parliamentary life, underlining the ongoing struggle between the occupation forces, the autocracy of the king's rule and the beginning of true democracy, *writes Aleyeddin Helal, as well* as a lack of confidence of parliament in the successive governments with which the chambers were in constant conflict. From 1919 to 1936 there were 20 governments and 8 sets of negotiations in which Egypt ceaselessly tried to whittle away British privileges. In 1936 largely because of the fascist Italian threat from Libya and Abyssinia, Egypt and Britain finally came together to sign the Anglo Egyptian Treaty.

THE FIRST PARLIAMENT convening according to the 1923 Constitution opened on 15 March 1924 for its first session after the elections in which the Wafd Party registered a sweeping victory. It was to be followed by nine parliaments from this date until February 1952 when the 1923 Constitution was finally abrogated.

The 1924 Parliament was plagued with tensions which threatened to develop into fully blown conflicts at any time. The three elements responsible for the very volatile situation were the Wafd Party, which thrived *on popular support and fought* the British unwaveringly, the king, inclined to despotism, who wanted to limit the constitution which curtailed his powers, and the British who found their interest served by playing them off against each other. The main characteristic of this parliament was the violent resentment of all its *members against the British. Saad Zaghloul eventually* resigned over the assassination of Sir Lee Stack, *sirdar* and governor general of the Sudan. The government fell and the parliament adjourned for one month.

After Saad Zaghloul's death in 1927, the struggle for independence continued and so did the conflicts between the king the parliament and the British. In March 1928 Tharwat Pasha, the then prime minister, resigned over objections by parliament to the Tharwat-Chamberlain talks. The government was replaced by a coalition government headed by Mustafa El-Nahhas who had taken Saad Zaghloul's place as leader of the Wafd Party. Soon this government was at loggerheads with both the palace and the British who attempted to break the coalition by playing one party against the other. Furthermore, details of what became known as the *"Seif El-Din affair" were leaked to the press to dis*credit El-Nahhas. The king finally demanded the resignation of the government.

Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha replaced El-Nahhas and formed a new government which suspended parliament for a month. The king with a government of his choice ruled during this period by royal decree. Parliament met however in defiance of the dissolution order at the house of Murad El-Sherei and declared the suspension of the Constitution void and the parliament still in session. A *vote of non-confidence was passed against the* government by both chambers. Both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies met again in November 1928 in the building of *Al-Balagh* publication to confirm the unconstitutionality of the government. These events provoked renewed popular unrest and protests against the government especially after the Mohamed Mahmoud-Chamberlain talks failed. The Wafd organised demonstrations which caused the government to resign.

Eventually a new government was formed, headed by Adli Yakan with a return to constitutional life. Elections brought the Wafd back and El-Nahhas announced the composition of his new government on 1 January 1930. The first session of parliament opened on 11 January. This government did not last six months. It was dismissed by the king in June 1930, *under the pretext that it had* been "unable to implement its programme." Ismail Sidki's government which followed had the dubious honour of adjourning parliament for a month then on 12 July dismiss it before it had time to vote the budget, an eminently unconstitutional move. Parliament met again in defiance, at the Saadist Club for a further vote of non-confidence.

ON 22 OCTOBER 1930, the 1923 Constitution *was abrogated to be replaced by a new bi-cameral* constitution on less liberal lines which aimed at curtailing the power of parliament. It provided for indirect elections, raised the age of electors to 25 years and restricted the right to vote subject to income. From this moment on and until its abrogation in 1935 the battles between the king and the *national movement centred around the restoration* of the 1923 Constitution.

The 1931 elections took place in a climate of unrest. The Sidki government resigned on 27 September 1933 and was followed by those of Abdel-Fattah Yehyia (27 September 1933 - 14 November 1934) and Mohamed Tawfik Nissim, 14 November 1934 who dissolved parliament on 30 November of the same year. Once more all powers were vested in the king until a new constitution could be drafted to replace the 1923 and the 1930 *Constitutions.*

On 12 December 1936 the king finally bowing to public demand restored the 1923 Constitution (unchanged) by royal decree. Elections took place under Ali Maher's government bringing the Wafd back once more, in a sweeping victory.

El-NAHHAS was the prime minister to whom befell the honour of signing the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty which gave Egypt a certain degree of independence but not enough to satisfy the *strong popular feelings of nationalism*. Britain *re*tained the responsibility of the defence of the Suez Canal as well as the right to station troops there. The question of sovereignty over the Sudan remained unresolved. The people wanted full independence and the signing of the treaty cost El-Nahhas his popularity. On 2 February 1938 the *Wafd lost the elections.*

The war brought back the British whose military presence renewed feelings of hatred and desires for total independence among the Egyptian population. From February 1938 to February 1942 seven governments succeeded one another until on 4 February 1942 the British, worried about the pro-German feelings of the government, forced King Farouk *manu militari* to bring El-Nahhas back. He remained at the head of the government until 1945.

WITH THE WAR moving away new elections were called in 1945 and rigged to defeat the Wafd. A troubled period followed which witnessed the rise and fall of eight governments as well as two political assassinations, those of prime ministers Ahmed Maher and Mahmoud Fahmi El-Noqrachi, *accused of collusion with the British and* the king.

In the elections of 1950 the Wafd was back headed by El-Nahhas. In 1951 he abrogated the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty which he had signed 15 years before. "I signed it in the name of Egypt and now I abrogate it in the name of Egypt," were his famous words. But neither the British nor the king wished to see the Wafd remain in power. They were aided in their intention of getting rid of El-Nahhas by the burning down of Cairo on 26 Jan*uary 1952. The government resigned the following* day. A series of governments followed from 27 January to 24 July 1952, the last, headed by Ahmed Naguib Al-Hilali lasting only two days from *22 July* to 24 July, when the Free Officers entered the political arena, writing a new chapter of Egyptian history.

*Sources: Abdel-Rahman El-Rafi'i, Asr Ismail, (Cairo 1932) and Al-Thawra Al-Qawmiya (Cairo, 1937); Aleyeddin Helal, **Politics and Governments in Egypt** (Al-Kittab Al-Gamei, Cairo,1977); Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, **Egypt in the Reign of Mohamed Ali** (Cambridge, 1984); Jacques Berque, Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution, (Faber & Faber, 1972) ; PM Holt, **Egypt and the Fertile Crescent 1516-1922** (Cornell, 1966).*

A guide to post-1952 parliaments

• 1957 - 1958
Majlis Al-Umma (The Nation's Assembly), consisted of 350 members and sat for five years. It was the first parliament under the new Constitution of 1956, which replaced the 1923 Constitution abrogated by the 1952 Revolution.
Speaker: Abdel-Latif El-Baghdadi

• 1958 - 1961
To mark the birth of the United Arab Republic a joint National Assembly of 600 members — 400 Egyptians and 200 Syrian — was set up. It coincided with the new Provisional Constitution issued in 1958 which set the terms for the merger union with Syria. The parliament was abrogated when the Union collapsed in June, 1961.
Speaker: Anwar El-Sadat

• 1964 - 1969
The third post-revolution parliament, based on the Provisional Constitution of 1964 which set the broad outlines of a socialist oriented, one-party (Arab Socialist Union) system in Egypt .
Speaker: Anwar El-Sadat

• 1969 - 1971
Elected in the aftermath of 1967 on the basis of the 1964 Constitution. During the sitting of this parliament President Nasser died and was succeeded by Sadat.
Speaker: Labib Shouqair

• 1971 - 1976
Majlis Al-Shaab (The People's Assembly), based on the 1971 Constitution which changed the name of the country to the Arab Republic of Egypt, and the name of the parliament to the People's Assembly. In 1976 the Arab Socialist Union was divided into three political platforms — right, left and centre — and elections were held accordingly.
Speakers: Hafiz Badawi and Sayed Marei

• 1976 - 1979
The first post-1952 parliament to comprise political groupings (the 3 platforms) which, a year later (according to Law No 40 of 1977) developed into fully fledged parties — the ruling Misr Party, chaired by Sadat; Tagammu Party, chaired by Khalid Mohieddin and the Liberal Party chaired by Mustafa Kamel Mourad). This parliament was dissolved by Sadat following the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in March 1979.
Speakers: Sayed Marei and Soufi Abu Talib

• 1979 - 1984
Sadat was assassinated in 1981, and succeeded by President Mubarak. In 1983 the parliament passed Law No 144/1983 *introducing party-lists and proportional* representation.
Speaker: Soufi Abu Talib

• 1984 - 1986
The first parliament to be elected on the basis of the new proportional representation system. The only opposition party which scored the percentage required to enter parliament was the New Wafd Party which had resurfaced following a legal battle won in 1983. The Wafd won 57 out of 360 seats. Not all these seats, however, were occupied by Wafd members proper. The alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wafd allowed some Islamist cadres to run on the Wafd Party ticket. But battles over the constitutional legality of preventing *independent candidates from running in the* elections resulted in the dissolution of the parliament in 1986. Law No 188/1986 was issued to amend the electoral system to allow for a combination of party-lists and independents.
Speakers: Soufi Abu Talib and Kamel Leila

• 1987 - 1990
The election of 1987 produced the biggest opposition block in any post-1952 parliament, with 90 opposition and independent members. The alliance between the Labour Party, the Liberal Party and the Muslim Brotherhood (known as the Islamic Alliance) held 60 seats, while the Wafd won 30 seats. This parliament, however, was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Constitutional Court, which ruled for a return to individual candidacy.
Speaker: Rif'at El-Mahgoub

• 1990 - 1995
With the exception of Al-Tagammu all opposition parties boycotted the 1990 elections, which took place against the backdrop of preparations for the Gulf War.
Speaker: Ahmed Fathi Serour



King Fuad in the Royal Coach that used to carry the king from Abdin Palace to parliament for the inaugural sessions

Peacock plumes

David Blake joins Marie Antoinette for a not too extravagant feast

Stars of the Cairo Opera and the Opera de Paris; Sarabande, music by J.S. Bach; Great classical and contemporary divertissements: Tchaikovsky: Casse-Noisette, Mahler: Adagietto, Prokofiev: Romeo et Juliette, Drigo: Le Corsaire; Jocelyn Bosser, choreographer; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 7 December



This display of ballet from the Paris Opera is the final gasp of a distinguished history. Its roots lie in the 19th century, though it goes up to and beyond the 1920s, encompassing, en route, the style of Darsonval and Lifar. Classical, though safely embedded in an avant-garde atmosphere.

Once they were the real big things, Meyerbeerian balletic machines. Everything was put to use — decor, stars, spectacle. The frisson generated would have resembled a haute couture show.

The "grand ballet" was closely related to "grande opera", and produced much great music. Stravinsky wrote for it. A grand, almost military formality set the pace for these shows of display. The Paris Opera enjoyed a silver age that only ended with the Second World War, to be revived again by Nureyev in his own silver age. It has tragic implications. A way of life was shattered, only to rise from the grave. And it has reached Cairo — stylish, laconic but rather worse for wear.

Watteau mixed with impressionism and some boneless post-modernism. *Sarabande* could all be a dream, but about what? Or they could all be in the land of the dead along with the white ostrich plumes of the Folies Bergéres.

A sarabande is a Spanish dance — rather ancient and formal with a special 1-2-3 rhythm, but with a hiccup. Jocelyn Bosser, the choreographer, never leapt out of the boundaries he seems to have set for himself. *Sarabande* seems to be light but conceals a jolt; it implies, evades and blurs any signs of exactitude. It says look how civilised we are, shrugs with a child's insolence and throws a lovely white velvet pillow in your face. Who eats this cake? Marie Antoinette? Couperin, rather than Bach, would have been more suitable for this *Sarabande* performance.

Costumes and decor were prepared by Nadia Tostolak and Aziza Khalil. Their work is always immaculate. *Sarabande* was mostly done in off-white colours streaked with pale greens. Action — Olympian intrigues between the dancing couples — young, poised and without scruples. And without heart. A cold sun shines, or rather filters through, from a pitiless space beyond our vision. It is a lonely, negative, bleached and perfectly laundered vision of hell.

The French and Egyptian stars shone like lasers. The French style used in this spectacle, so grand, is extended almost to the point of absurdity. But most of the dancers seemed to move into it with pleasure. Some known here — Erminia Kamel partnered by Eddik Griniok — seemed to grow a tone cooler as they picked their fastidious path across the stage, arched and forbidding. One would have to take great care of one's status at this assembly of shining white ghosts, their distaste and mockery sharpened to a scalpel-like cutting edge. Between the isolated incidents and involvements of these beings it would be more fun to leap to the exit door. Etiquette forbids a smile in the doing. Even old Bach is kept firmly in his place. Nothing quirky in this *Sarabande*.

It went on through endless convolutions like a fugue. The stars of the Paris Opera — Kader Belarbi, Fanny Gaida, Delphine Moussin, Jean Guillaume Bart and their accompanying dancers — formed a court: aloof, grand and with superb physiques stretched to the limit. The men had elevation and force without effort. No one can ask more of dancers. The grande jettée was used throughout the ballet with only a vestige of a scenario to help. All the dancers concerned in this peacock gaming interlude held themselves aloft, like lost beauties. But all of it seemed strange for 1995. The atmosphere of this *Sarabande* was too distinguished for feelings, placing insuperable difficulties on the dancers. What are they, birds or horses? Do they love anything but themselves? In this ballet, probably nothing more than their splendid white plumed hats. The grandes jettées go on and on, evoking horses performing difficult dressages. Do they ever eat anything? Probably each other.

The second half of this spectacle, items from the classical and contemporary repertoire, presented the stars and moons of the two companies. Erminia Kamel and Eddik Griniok in *Casse-Noisette*: Kamel, though poised, seemed ill at ease; her arms, however, matched the French for long reach. Mahler's *Adagietto* — with Delphine Moussin and Jean Guillaume Bart, choreographed by Oscar Araiz — was torn from the symphony to introduce Visconti's film *Death in Venice*. It haunts and frightens like the slow approach of a poisonous insect which you know will sting you to death. The two dancers heave about the stage and fall at last into the final erotic death coma — the most exalted thing of the evening.

Next we had, unannounced in the programme, a pair of scorpions — gauzy bronze creatures up to no good. The dancers were shining. They come together but she's not having him. He's no good — probably a mob hit man from the way he uses his groin and loins. She gives him the push but she better be careful not to stray down that dark lane.

The Balcony Scene of *Romeo and Juliette* — not quite MacMillan. Erminia Kamel and Eddik Griniok were romantic and moonstruck. She has less to do than poor Romeo, who must heave and heave his Juliette — and heave again all over the stage. Oh his back! Both dancers were right for their role and feeling at last came to the stage. Prokofiev of course helped.

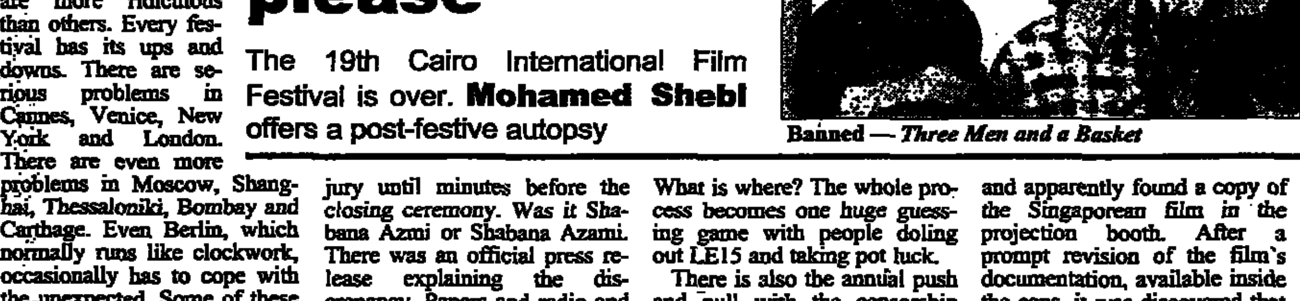
Le Corsaire: Petipa, Drigo and almost any two superstars of every ballet company going. This evening: Fanny Gaida and Kader Belarbi. This wonderful, vulgar, thrilling, outrageous, breathless heave-ho for Macho and Maiden never dies. She in pearls, he in see-through track suit, were fetching. They were as impudent and muscular as the ballet requires. Belarbi is a fable — he finally jets himself into the air, straight up like a dolphin, does a few turns in the air and...it's worth waiting for...he hurls himself down at her feet on his neck — exact to the last beat. These two dancers brought down the roof. *Le Corsaire*: Sweaty, swanky, Saturday night at the Allambrah Dance Hall. On big dance nights, this usually ends everything: the dancers, the audience and the evening.

The visit of the Paris Opera Ballet was a sensation. It all ends as in an American musical with the entire troupe coming down an old-fashioned Follies staircase to front stage to acknowledge the expected ovation. It came, bravos and all.

Cinema

The envelope please

The 19th Cairo International Film Festival is over. **Mohamed Shebl** offers a post-festive autopsy



Banned — *Three Men and a Basket*

All festivals are ridiculous, as George Orwell might have said, but some festivals are more ridiculous than others. Every festival has its ups and downs. There are serious problems in Cannes, Venice, New York and London. There are even more problems in Moscow, Shanghai, Thessaloniki, Bombay and Carthage. Even Berlin, which normally runs like clockwork, occasionally has to cope with the unexpected. Some of these problems are inevitable — films will get caught up in air strikes, their reels will somehow get mixed up because the sticker on the cans is written only in Chinese. The posters of a participating film are almost guaranteed to arrive late and as a consequence the film receives inadequate exposure. But unfortunately, the Cairo Film Festival seems unable to brush off many of the chronic problems that besiege it and mar the festivities.

Here we will omit any reference to logistical problems like airport mishandling, films being delayed, hotel bookings etc, and just concentrate on what can and should be corrected if this festival is to retain the international credibility it fought so hard for in the first place.

Let's start with the simplest and least costly.

Proof reading. The spelling mistakes in the very expensive catalogue, the daily panorama and the schedule booklets are really quite appalling. Surely someone knows how to spell simple things like Germany. Names of films, actors, actresses and directors were inconsistent throughout the festival. There were heated debates about the surname of the head of the international jury until minutes before the closing ceremony. Was it Shabana Azmi or Shabana Azami. There was an official press release explaining the discrepancy. Papers and radio and television interviewers fought it out. Someone suggested walking up to the actress and asking a bald question. "What is your name?" An ingenious solution which our emcee finally ventured forth to do and the riddle was solved. It's Azmi after all.

The foreigners were bewildered as to the titles of the Egyptian films because they carried more than one translation. The Egyptians, on the other hand, were bewildered at some of the titles of the foreign films, titles that seemed at times to border on the asinine.

In the case of *Three Men and a Basket* the title of the film was transformed into "*Cheap Desires*" and caused quite a fuss when it hit the movie theatres.

To be sure there were the usual foul-ups at movie houses and the public expressed its disapproval in its usual, exceedingly vocal manner. Led to believe that the film they are about to see is a sizzling picture when in fact it is an extended reminiscence of childhood in Bosnia, they voice their disappointment. The managers of some cinema theatres played havoc with the published schedule when they decided to replace artsy but boring films with hotter-than-usual Turkish or Greek productions. What is where? The whole process becomes one huge guessing game with people doling out LE15 and taking pot luck.

There is also the annual push and pull with the censorship bureau, though recently things seemed to be improving. There was a time when they just butchered the film, slicing out what they deemed unsavory. This year, a more enlightened censorship gave the stamp of approval to most of the films, withholding 16 per cent and restricting another collection to critics and journalists only.

Out of a list of 230 films this was no mean feat. But this year the festival witnessed a dangerous twist in events, a change of circumstances that may well cast a shadow over the festival's future.

This year, and for the very first time, cinema theatres witnessed the ugly and unbecoming sight of the equivalent of the vice squad barging into projecting rooms and managers' offices to confiscate cans of films. These events occurred not once but several times, and the cinemas raided include Diana, Rivoli, Radio and Karim. The films that excited the attention of our moral policemen included, among others, *Three Men and a Basket* (France), *Mee Pok Man* (Singapore) and *Betty Blue* (France). Word has it that a night patrol on a regular mission passed by Cinema Diana at midnight (!) to check if any irregularities were taking place, and apparently found a copy of the Singaporean film in the projection booth. After a prompt revision of the film's documentation, available inside the cans, it was discovered that it carried license "D" which makes it eligible to be screened only once, and only to critics and journalists. Then and there the copy was confiscated and a report on police findings was filed. The squad continued on to Cinema Rivoli, reaching it close to 1.15 am and finding the infamous sign "Cheap Desires .... for adults only .... the most explicit film of the festival" plastered on the theatre gates. In the projection booth the police force discovered that only 15 minutes of the film remained to be screened. And 15 minutes later, it was promptly confiscated. The police discovered that another reel was due to arrive from Cinema Radio. Quick dash across town — only to find Cinema Radio closed. Back to Rivoli, where the excited audience was almost 1,000 strong. The police force, after procuring reinforcements, evacuated the theatre and organised the repayment of LE15,000 in box office receipts.

Later, much later, around 4.00 am, and after another report had been filed, this time in the premises of the vice department, loud protests were made because these films were, so to speak, foreign commodities that technically belonged to the respective embassies of their countries of origin. The copies were thus returned after signing the necessary documents, and the following day the whole process started all over again, only this time the location was the bureau for censorship. There it was proven that the Singaporean film had all the sequences noted in the original report and that it was banned from general viewing and was intended for one screening only before a restricted audience of critics and journalists. As for the second film, the one that caused the major fuss, *Three Men and a Basket*, it was discovered that the film was a light comedy that had been screened on, of all places, Egyptian television. *Cheap Desires* could not be traced since it was a wholly fabricated title.

The mistakes have been all too plain, from mangled translations to confused choreography. Poor Ms Azmi, having verified her name, had to ask, as head of jury, that the assistants actually have the statuettes and the certificates of merit ready before the guests went on stage, instead of fumbling before live cameras, without a clue as to where to go or what to do.

Last but not least, the supposedly sealed envelopes containing the supposedly secret results were available to the press long before they were announced on stage. As a matter of fact, newspapers were available with the results of the competition at nine o'clock on the day of the closing ceremony, which might explain why the overwhelming majority of film stars missed the closing ceremony and opted to watch it at home on the telly.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Crafts Exhibition
3 Addy St, Mesaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 337 3736. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until 17 Dec.
Antique furniture, Moroccan woodwork, Syrian handicrafts and Fayoumi pottery.

Kimberly Odekirk (Batik)
Al-Shomou' Gallery, Villa 12, Rd 150, Al-Horreya Sq, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 19 Dec.

Seven Korean Artists (Paintings)
Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 20 Dec.

Anga Khalil Heloo (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 Dec.

Adly Rizkallah (Watercolours)
Khan Al-Maghraby Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10am-3pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 24 Dec.

Group Exhibition
Doroub Gallery, 4 Latin America St, Garden City. Tel 354 7951. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 25 Dec.
Landscapes by thirty-three artists.

Golo
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 25 Dec.
Golo takes a look at life in the coffee shops.

Leila El-Hakim (Collages)
Round Gallery of the Fine Arts Syndicate, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0594. Daily 10am-9pm. 18-28 Dec.

Timothy Keating (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 28 Dec.

Mohamed Taha Hussein (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 28 Dec.

Wagdi Habashi (Paintings) & Osama Mohamed (Glasswork)
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 30 Dec.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Documents)
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 1 Jan.

The Egypt of The Past
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 6 Jan.
Photography exhibition of monuments and landscapes.



Mohamed Taha Hussein

Adel El-Siwi (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 11 Jan.
Recent works by a leading contemporary artist.

Omar Hilal (Photographs)
Lobby of the Jameel Center, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 354 2968. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 15 Jan.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour Al-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
The world's largest collection of nineteenth century European art.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Chateau Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

FILMS

Konrad Wolf Retrospective
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 758 877.
The Naked Man On The Playing Field: *14 Dec, 6.30pm.*
Lissy: *18 Dec, 6.30pm.*
Solo Sunny: *19 Dec, 6.30pm.*
Sun Seekers: *20 Dec, 6.30pm*

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
La Sentinelle d'Arnaud Desplechin: *14 Dec, 7pm.*
La Passerelle: *18 Dec, 7pm.*
Juliette Ou La Clef Des Songes: *20 Dec, 7pm.*

Jesus of Nazareth I
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 17 Dec, 6pm.

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

The Good Son
Odeon, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Monkey Trouble
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Dumb & Dumber
Cosmos II, as above.

Dogs of Hell in 3-D
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

The Distinguished Gentleman
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Braveheart
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Cinema Metro Festival
35, Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
14 Dec: **Hard Target**
15 Dec: **For Your Eyes Only**
16 Dec: **Naked Gun**
17 Dec: **Licence To Kill**

Abu Zeid Zamanah (The Abu Zeid of His Time)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Yom Har Geddan (A Very Hot day)
Tiba II, Nasr City, Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Teyour Al-Thalam (Birds of the Dark)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Al-Garage (The Garage)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

CAIRO FESTIVAL SPECIAL FEATURES

Thursday, 14 Dec
Tahrir: The Four Weddings And A Funeral (UK)
Cairo Sheraton: Belmonte (Spain)
Karim: Beyond Rangoon (USA)
Rivoli: Citizen X (USA)
Radio: The Flor Contemplacion Story (Philippines)
Normandy: The Wrong Man (USA)
Friday, 15 Dec
Tahrir: Beyond Rangoon (USA)
Cairo Sheraton: Citizen X (USA)
Karim: Belmonte (Spain)
Rivoli: Romeo Is Bleeding (USA)
Radio: The Wrong Man (USA)
Normandy: Four Weddings And A Funeral (UK)
Saturday, 16 Dec
Tahrir: The Wrong Man (USA)
Cairo Sheraton: Romeo Is Bleeding (USA)
Karim: Citizen X (USA)
Rivoli: Belmonte (Spain)
Radio: Beyond Rangoon (USA)
Normandy: The Flor Contemplacion Story (Philippines)
Sunday, 17 Dec
Tahrir: Belmonte (Spain)
Cairo Sheraton: The Wrong Man (USA)
Karim: The Flor Contemplacion Story (Philippines)
Rivoli: Four Weddings And A Funeral (UK)
Radio: Romeo Is Bleeding (USA)
Normandy: Citizen X (USA)

Tahrir: 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Cairo Sheraton: Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
Karim: 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Rivoli: 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Radio: 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Normandy: 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

MUSIC

Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 14 Dec, 8pm.
Performing works by Daoud Hosni and Farid El-Atrashi.

Amadeus Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 Dec, 8pm.

Works for Choir and Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Dec, 8pm.
The Aachener Chamber Choir and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra perform Bach's Christmas Oratorio 1-3.

Children's Choir
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Dec, 2pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Dec, 8pm.

The Stars of The Opera House
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 16 Dec, 8pm.

Symphonietta
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 Dec, 8pm.
Mozart's Serenata Notturna, Schubert's Unfinished Symphony and other works.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 Dec, 8pm.
Spanish pianist Emili Brugallia performs.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 19 Dec, 8pm.
Yasser Mokhtar performs works by Haydn, Schubert, Liszt, Prokofiev and Abu Bakr Khairat.

DANCE

The Nutcracker
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 18-19 Dec, 8pm. 20 Dec, 11am & 8pm.

THEATRE

Al-Sahara (The Sorceress)
George Abiad, Al-Ataba. Tel 579 1778. Daily 9pm.

Al-Ganzir (The Chain)
Al-Salam, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

Al-Khashaba (The Plank)
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 8pm. Until 18 Dec.
Starring Hussein El-Sherbini, directed by Ossama Fawzy.

Dastour Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily exc Mon, 9.30pm.
A man pays dearly for running against the president in the elections. Play by Mahmoud El-Toukhi, directed by Galal El-Sharkawi, starring Ahmed Bedeir and Nermine El-Feqi.

Hazz Nawa'em (Nawa'em's Luck)
Al-Hounaper, 16 Al-Ter'a Al-Boulaqeya St. Tel 769 233. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Directed by Rossiq El-Bahnassiwouri, starring Dalal Abdel-Aziz, Mahmoud El-Guindi and So'ad Nasr.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon & Fri 8pm.
Starring Adel Imam in a play scripted by Farouk Sabri.

Al-Gamila wal Wehshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)
Al-Zamalek, 13 Shagaret Al-Dor, Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily 10.30pm, exc Fri 8.30pm.
Starring Laila Elwi as the gamila and everyone else as the wehshin.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St, Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon 8pm.
With Mohamed Sobhi, director and lead actor, in a socio-political allegory written by Mahdi Youssef.

Lowly
Balloon, Corniche Al-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily exc Tues, 9pm.
Musical starring Fayza Kamal, Mohamed El-Helw and Mohamed Nouh.

Ya Nas Efhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm.
Starring Saad Rashed, Dina Abdallah and Hassan Kami.

Ra's Al-Dieek (Cockerel Dances)
Miami, Talaat Harb St. Tel 767 086. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Starring Nagah El-Mougi with Mohamed Abul-Hassan and Aida Riad.

Bahloul fi Istanbul (Bahloul in Istanbul)
Hilton Ramsis, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Sun 8pm.
Samir Ghanem stars with Elham Shahine in yet another comedy.

La...Bala'sh Keda (None of That)
Al-Rihani, Emadeddin. Tel 591 3697. Daily exc Wed 10pm. Tues 8.30pm.
Starring Fouad, Mamdouh Abdel-Alim and Hanan El-Torki.

Hazzemni Ya...(Tie Me Up...)
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Saoud, Manial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm.
A musical involving extensive belly-dancing by Fifi Abdou. Also starring Medhat Saleh and Sherif Mounir.

National Circus
Next to Balloon Theatre, Al-Nil St, Corniche Al-Nil, Al-Agouza. Tel 347 0612. Daily exc Wed, 9pm.

LECTURES

Recent Discoveries of Wall Paintings in Deir Al-Sourian
Netherlands Institute for Archeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 14 Dec, 5.30pm.

Open Discussion With Martin Bernal Author of *Black Athena*
Supreme Council of Culture, 16 Dec, 6pm.

Egyptian Parliamentary Elections; Evaluations And Expectations *Blue Room, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 17 Dec, 4pm.*

The Opening of the Mouth Ritual
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, corner of Al-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. 17 Dec. 5.30pm.

Challenges to Democratisation: Are Women the Answer?
Oriental Hall, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 18 Dec, 5pm.

Readings in Arabic Prose through the Ages (in Arabic)
Oriental Hall, as above. 19 Dec, 6pm.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

Traditional architecture in Al-Medina Al-Munawarra is the subject of **Fouad Taha Mugharbil's** 30 paintings on show at the gallery attached to the Scientific Design Centre. Though realism has not been abandoned, the works have a decidedly cubist feel.

Textile wall hangings by **Thanaa Ezz El-Din** are on exhibit at the gallery attached to the Faculty of Applied Arts. Technically accomplished, they depict fantastic half-human creatures made up of elements drawn from diverse cultural sources.



Calligraphy at the Opera House

Calligraphy — different scripts, diverse media — by 12 artists feature at the gallery attached to the Opera House.

Surrealist ink-drawings by **Sayed El-Qamash** — sci-fi visions of a future where man and machine are indistinguishable — occupy the gallery space of the **Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, Zamalek.**

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

If all the world is a stage then Sami Khashaba, newly appointed head of the floundering state-run theatre, and Hoda Wasfi, the new manager of the National Theatre, have become key players. **Nehad Selaiha** talks to the two people charged with salvaging the state theatre establishment



The National Theatre — apex of the state theatre establishment. Will new appointees be able to breathe life into an aging institution? photo: Mohamed Lutfi

The staging posts

In the course of a two-day symposium held by the British Council in 1991 at the Small Hall of the Opera House (under the title "The British Theatre: Egyptian Perspectives"), the issues of funding, sponsorship, subsidies, censorship and state control in both countries were extensively discussed. Actor and director Karam Mutawe, then head of the Egyptian state theatre establishment, was present in his official capacity. He had held the post for barely a year, time enough for him to become thoroughly disillusioned. He bitterly complained that the governmental body in his charge was bureaucracy-ridden, infested with swarms of idle, petty officials who were eating up its budget. Any new initiative was bound to run into such a thick tangle of rules, laws, regulations and endless paperwork that it could hardly survive. He finished by comparing the state theatre organisation to an old, decayed, ramshackle building long overdue for demolition.

Mutawe may have been an inept administrator, as some people described him at the time — after all, few artists really succeed as administrators. But the performance of his successor, Sayyid Radi (Mutawe resigned in March '92), led even the most fervent supporters of the state-run theatre to doubt its viability in its present form. Change was indicated, and not simply of leaders. A new formula or mode of operation were badly needed.

At one time, even the minister of culture himself seemed to have given up on the state theatre establishment. At the Journalists Syndicate, last June, when taken to task over its poor performance in recent years, he stoutly declared (disturbingly echoing Mutawe's earlier pronouncement at the Opera House) that he had come to look upon it as an old, rotten and decaying tree that could neither be revived nor uprooted. It would eventually collapse of its own accord, he said with enviable equanimity.

But much as the minister of culture may have wished to shut out the sight of the 'decaying tree', he was forced in the subsequent months to give it serious thought. In July, Sayyid Radi reached the age of retirement and although it was decided that he should stay on, at the top of the 'tree', so to speak, until the end of the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre, the need to find a new, and hopefully more competent, head was pressing.

For two months, theatrical and media circles buzzed with news and rumours. Names were bandied about, engaging people in mild or heated controversy. There was even some betting. But from the moment Sami Khashaba's name was floated, it proved a clear favourite.

As a young man, Khashaba arrived on the cultural scene armed with substantial credentials. Not only was he the son of the famous Dereeni Khashaba — a distinguished literary critic and translator and one of the pioneering figures in the field of theatre studies in Egypt, he had also spent four years in prison, from 1960 to 1964, for political dissent. At a time when the Egyptian intelligentsia was predominantly of the left and constantly engaged in a tug-of-war with the nominally socialist military regime, this painful and harrowing experience (deeply etched in Sami Khashaba's mind and vividly remembered in all its details, down to the smell of dung in Al-Hadrah prison's animal farm) was regarded as a rite of passage into intellectual circles. Professionally, however, it was something of a handicap. For a number of years, Khashaba, with a BA in journalism from Cairo University (1960) held no permanent job, but worked as a freelance journalist, translator and critic, contributing theatre and literary reviews to magazines and newspapers and publishing several translations of seminal English books on theatre.

From 1964 onward, Khashaba managed to build a solid reputation as a well-informed, serious-minded cultural figure. Apart from his many translations, he published three books in which literature, drama and theatre were consistently viewed in the wider context of culture and politics. His magnum opus, however, a dictionary of modern literary, cultural and philosophical terms (of which one volume has already been published) and a related "who's who" of contemporary thinkers and philosophers, owes its genesis to his work at *Al-Ahram*. He joined the paper as a permanent member of staff in 1978 and his involvement in the cultural section and heavy responsibilities as sub-editor-in-chief and editor of the weekly Friday cultural page resulted in a gradual physical (and, perhaps, mental) withdrawal from the bustling life of theatre. As drama faded away as a central preoccupation, his writing began to reflect a keen interest in history, sociology, philosophy, and literary and critical theory.

Over the years, Khashaba's visits to the theatre had become few and far between. Upon hearing that he had been entrusted with the running of the state theatre sector, many theatre people, particularly those who had never met him and knew nothing about his intense involvement in theatre in the sixties and seventies, wondered how he would cope with the practical side of the job. But that was not their only worry. Immediately after Khashaba's appointment, some of the things he said in the press were misinterpreted, and he was sometimes misquoted with the result that many got the impression that he meant to take the theatre back to the sixties, or even further back, to the age of classical tragedy. The prospect of being treated to endless declamations in one turgid and pedantic drama after another seemed very depressing.

Khashaba was neither surprised nor the least bit offended when I told him what many thought. In fact, he seemed rather tickled. Leaning back in his chair and smiling broadly, he said: "I think you critics are responsible for this rumour. I am not a grim and gloomy person, and I have kept in touch with what has been happening in the theatre. I am aware that deep, serious tragedy has gone out of favour and that black comedy is in. But there will always be a place for the classics in the repertoire — a system and tradition I am determined to revive. The heritage of Egyptian drama too will have its place, but some old texts will have to be re-worked or handled experimentally to bring them up to date and make them relevant. As for contemporary drama, there is no shortage of texts. The problem is that most playwrights nowadays need to work with a director or dramaturge to make their literary texts fit for the stage, and some of them don't like that, though it is widely practiced in the West. Arabic drama will have a niche as well, and we will try to keep up with the latest in world theatre."

Khashaba is fully aware that he has inherited a vast, rambling, and almost derelict organisation. Over half the budget, he says, goes into salaries, incentives, over-time payments plus other items (maintenance, cleaning, transport etc.). At any one time half of the work force are idle, an unnecessary financial burden. And few as they are, he said, state theatres are generally poorly equipped and in a bad state of repair. Some urgently need extensive restoration, others to be pulled down and rebuilt. All the artists and technicians working for the state theatre companies, he continued, have become stagnant and need intensive retraining to improve their standard of performance.

The infrastructure (buildings and equipment) takes priority in Khashaba's plans. With the help of loans and donations from banks, private businesses and other financial institutions, as well as foreign aid from Japan, France, Britain and other countries, theatres like the National, El-Tali'a, Al-Salaam, the Puppet Theatre and Sayed Darwish in Alexandria will be refurbished. The floating theatre in Giza will be roofed and renovated. But not a single tree, plant or blade of grass, Khashaba emphatically said, will suffer in the process. Other theatres, like Metropol, Mohamed Farid and Masr, which were declared unsafe after the '92 earthquake, will be pulled down and rebuilt as commercial-cum-entertainment complexes. The commercial area of each building, when sold, will bring in enough cash to cover the costs of a theatre hall, a concert hall and a library in the upper storeys.

New venues are also contemplated, particularly in the provinces. Khashaba has already taken permission from the governor of Gharbiyah to renovate and use the theatre in Tanta, and shortly will negotiate a similar arrangement for theatres in Mansoura and Assuit. Plans for a number of small portable theatres are also being batched: the tents and seats will be bought locally, but the technical equipment will have to be imported. Also, the theatrical spaces available at Al-Mahka (near the Citadel), the Manesterly Palace in Manial, and Al-Hod Al-Marsoud garden in Sayyeda Zeinab, will be fitted out and extensively used.

For the artists and technicians, he is already arranging with Dr. Hoda Wasfi, the director of Al-Hanager and the National, several training programmes, workshops and refresher-courses here and abroad. Cultural contact and exposure to new and different artistic experience, he believes, are essential for developing the skills of the artist and stimulating his or her imagination and creativity. Khashaba also believes in financial incentives. To attract more actors to the state theatre productions and persuade those on the monthly payrolls of his theatres to pull their weight and not play truant, he has laid down new financial regulations that allow attractive remuneration over and above the salaries. Another project, in the pipeline is a resident theatre company in Alexandria, based at the Sayed Darwish Theatre.

Khashaba acknowledges that some sections of the organisation have far too many employees than needed. "The salaries they get are more like redundancy payments." Since he cannot sack them (and would not want to in any case for humane reasons), he has come up with the practical idea of retraining and redeploying the supernumeraries. Some sections, particularly those that require special technical skills, like the Puppet Theatre, have a shortage of workers. Retraining the existing manpower works out cheaper than contracting outsiders. Another way of saving money is to insist that you get real work and real service for the money you pay. "I shall continue to pay my employees the incentives they have come to regularly expect and depend on for making ends meet. But I shall insist that they do real work in return. The same goes for the private companies who are contracted to do the maintenance and cleaning of the buildings. If they don't do the job properly, I'm not paying."

Still on the theme of money, Khashaba said that for the next few seasons, the accent would be on popular productions that bring in good box-office returns. "A lot of money is needed for infrastructure projects. This does not mean that we are going commercial," he hastened to add. "The state theatre will always remain a cultural service. That is why I am not putting up ticket prices. In fact, to draw more young people to the theatre, we are thinking of allowing all university students into our theatres for a nominal fee of two pounds. The real money will come from marketing the product on a wide scale on video tapes, or else selling the broadcasting rights. That is why we need marketing experts and a careful plan."

Khashaba talked of other dreams and plans — joint theatrical ventures with prestigious private companies; productions going on tour in the provinces and the Arab world; a network of small theatres stretching over the country from north to south...

"And the abolition of censorship, perhaps?" I interrupted.

"It will be a very very long time before we can do that. Ours is an orthodox society. In ethics and ideology, we, both Muslims and Christians, are traditionalists. We cling to our heritage and are loath to change. Whether we like it or not, we tend to conform with the established and accepted standards in everything. That is why it will take our society a long time to get rid of censorship and learn to respect the conscience and moral judgement of the individual."

"Would you describe yourself as a religious person?"

"Well, I am a believer, though not dogmatic."

"Would you describe yourself as a modernist, post-modernist, free thinker or what?"

"I like the free-thinker category. But I am wary of labels that have definite Western shading. I deeply believe in cultural specificity; but I also believe in the value of cultural content and even acculturation. As a man of this age I cannot escape the influence of its philosophies and schools of thought. For a long time I have been trying to interpret modernism and postmodernism in purely Egyptian terms, to find their equivalent in Egyptian thought."

How does he find time?

"I sleep six or seven hours, wake up early, read for three hours and then am out all day. There is plenty of time."

Before parting, I couldn't help asking:

"You said it will be a long time before we can shake off censorship. How long do you think the state-run theatre will survive?"

"Politically, ideologically and economically, the country is gradually moving in the direction of liberalism. As part of society, theatre will reflect this change. Eventually, the major part of theatrical activity will be free. Nevertheless, a state theatrical institution of some kind will remain. The government will sponsor and support it but will not interfere with its work or seek to control it ideologically.

"Politically, ideologically and economically, the country is gradually moving in the direction of liberalism. As part of society, theatre will reflect this change. Eventually, the major part of theatrical activity will be free."

Sami Khashaba

"You cannot hope to disrupt the old, ossified institutions in a sudden, radical way. It has to be a gradual and subtle process...any gain in freedom, however slight, creates tremors that shake the foundations"

Hoda Wasfi

Of the five newly appointed managers of the state theatre companies, Hoda Wasfi stands out as a particularly happy choice. She combines deep theoretical knowledge with valuable practical experience and commands wide respect in theatrical circles. With her boundless energy and infectious enthusiasm, she will be a staunch and invaluable ally for Khashaba. For four years she has run Al-Hanager, creating an informal, zingy and thoroughly unbureaucratic atmosphere. She runs this active, highly productive, bustling place with only a handful of technicians and assistants. To reach her, you do not have to go through the usual, long, official rigmarole: if she is there, you just walk in and see her, and she has the rare talent of being able to attend to four or five people at once.

Sometimes Wasfi strikes me as one of those people who are never destined to lose their innocence or develop the slightest degree of cynicism. With two grown children, one married and one at university, she is still shockable and can handle neither malice nor deceit. It comes, I suppose, from being brought up to speak her mind frankly and from her long years in the cloisters of academia. Paradoxically, however, she does not lack worldly wisdom and has a very clear grasp of the mechanisms of cultural work in Egypt and its socio-political and ideological context. Speaking of her plans to revive the National (an institution which over the years has sunk under the weight of its own history and stately reputation, as she described it) she said:

"You cannot hope to disrupt the old, ossified institutions in a sudden, radical way. It has to be a gradual and subtle process. Take Al-Hanager, for example; it was originally conceived as part of this process."

"Its position on the fringe of the state-theatre institution is supposed to give it substantial freedom of movement; but the freedom is subtly controlled, since the centre has no independent budget and has constantly to appeal to the ministry for funds with every new project. One reads a kind of contradiction here, a hesitation, a reluctance to be pinned down to a definite course of action. Nevertheless, in time, this policy, timid and wary as it is, works. The gain in freedom, however slight, creates tremors that shake the foundations and, in time, they produce wider reverberations.

"What is sadly missing now is the power of direct confrontation. It is actually missing all over the world — perhaps because of the climate of postmodernism which does not encourage faith or certainty or direct conflict. Does not postmodernism, in one sense, mean living with contradictions and ambivalence and working through them? This is what I am trying to do. It is difficult, exhausting and time consuming, but what can you do?

Some of Wasfi's plans for bringing about gradual change without fruitless and counter-productive confrontations sound quite exciting. They include an honest reappraisal and sifting of the dramatic heritage of the National by giving public play-readings of all the texts in its repertory, followed by discussions with the audience to gauge their reactions; the ones that win favour will be entrusted to young directors to see what they make of them. The productions that result, plus the audience response, will help to determine, at least for this age, the value, viability and relevance of those texts. Even the plays of the hallowed sixties will be put on trial. Already a young female director, Iffat Yehya, is working on Saaddeddin Wahba's famous *Sikkat as-Salama* (The Road to Safety). In fact, out of the seven productions Wasfi plans for the National this year, five will come from the theatre's cupboards. They will be done on a limited budget by young directors and address matinee audiences. The other two will be grand productions, directed at an older and more conservative audience. Eventually, Wasfi hopes that National productions will be fit to play in foreign international festivals.

"It's a shame," she says, "that over five years the National has not produced a single production fit to represent us at such festivals."

Another of Wasfi's plans to attack the thick, dead tissue that has formed round the National over the years and pump new blood into it is cultural contact and exposure. Not one to let the grass grow under her feet, she has already arranged an all-the-year-round programme of cooperation with the Higher Institute of Theatre Technique in Avignon. She is also currently shopping around for a director of international standing for a production of one of Moliere's plays. This is her way of nudging awake the pantheon of veteran actors she has inherited with the National.

"These people," she says, "will never accept to do a workshop. But if I invite a well-known international director every year to direct them in a play, they will feel challenged and flattered and want to work with him. It will not change the method of acting they have been brought up in and used for years, but it will definitely refine it and make it more sophisticated. It is a kind of cross fertilisation which, I am sure, will have positive results. The talented artist — and most of these people are really talented, however old and set in their ways — cannot resist a chance to develop his or her skills and discover new rhythms. And mind you, these people have their audiences too, who like their traditional method of acting and I intend to cater for them, and even for the lovers of melodrama. It is still a very popular form as I argued in one of my papers."

Wasfi's association with Al-Hanager and the Experimental Theatre Festival (which she directed for many years) has given her a false reputation for favouring only the new and experimental in art. In fact, she enjoys all forms of theatre so long as they are well done. "I do not," she says, "want the Egyptian theatre to fall into the trap of extreme formalism as the Tunisians have done. Nor do I want it to remain imprisoned in the old formulas. We must find a middle way."

The middle way may come about through another contemplated cross-fertilisation process between Al-Hanager and the National on the model of the Comedie Française and the Vieux Colombier theatres.

The French model in theatre and cultural matters in general haunts Wasfi's mind. She admires the way the French manage and promote their culture.

"The French take their culture very seriously and treat it as a *figure de marque*, as an ambassador abroad," she says.

"Their Ministry of Culture works in close association with their Ministry of Foreign Affairs which has a special department, the Association Française d'Action Artistique (AFAA)."

"When you hold an annual festival like Les Allumes over six years in an old city like Nantes — it is really an old port — and expose its conservative community to different modes of art from all over the world, you are actually teaching that community all about cultural plurality and difference, the need for tolerance, for accepting the otherness of the other, and reveling in it, and for respecting cultural specificity."

In citing the French and other European cultural models, Wasfi is not advocating slavish imitation, but, rather, seeking inspiration as well as confirmation of what she deeply believes in. Besides, she is one of those people who have a dialectical cast of mind and can only think through comparisons. She also has a habit of illustrating and corroborating her ideas with examples; it is as if she feels a need for anchoring all ideas and abstract concepts in a tangible reality that gives them validation. Which is why, when she tries to understand and define the National Theatre in its present condition, she tends to view it in relation to the Comedie Française on which it was originally modelled. And when she tries to understand what is wrong with her society, she finds it fruitful to compare it with others in specific, concrete terms, through examples. With her, meaning can only emerge through this dialectical process which entails a close investigation of lived experience — hers and others'. A woman like Wasfi should only succeed at the National. But if the system should prove too much for her, you can be sure she will put up a good fight before she concedes defeat.

Plain Talk

I have been in the habit of providing a postscript to important events. This time I have two such postscripts. One is related to the visit of the Norwegian minister of culture, the second to the Cairo International Film Festival, and both are about two impressive personalities.

Aase Kleveland has just ended an official visit to Egypt where she signed two bilateral agreements, one with the minister of culture concerning cultural exchanges, the other detailing the Norwegian contribution towards the Alexandria Library project. My concern here is with the Norwegian minister of culture herself.

In my TV programme *Open Forum* and in a special interview, we discussed numerous issues including the relation between the state and the arts and cross-cultural encounters. A firm believer that culture should be made available to everyone and not just city dwellers, Kleveland has concentrated on the regional dissemination of culture. A believer in the capacity of music to act as a bridge connecting different cultures, Kleveland this year initiated an interesting project called A Meeting in Music whose objective is to allow a group of young musicians from Norway, Egypt, Zimbabwe and India to spend time together, listening to and learning from each other. These musicians gave an enthralling performance at Al-Hanager Art Centre thereby sharing with a wider group their cross-cultural experience.

My second postscript concerns another highly cultured woman, Shabana Azmi who, in addition to being the Indian film star who has won many prizes in film festivals all over the world, is an impressive intellectual. The daughter of the renowned Urdu poet and activist Kaifi Azmi, Shabana has inherited her father's committment to social and political issues.

Shabana, whom I had the pleasure to interview, was involved in hunger strikes to protest against the glaring disparities between rich and poor, particularly the slum dwellers of Bombay, and against the wave of communalism. She is also a great speaker and, in the spring of 1993, she addressed 16 universities in the US on topics ranging from communalism to women's issues.

Shabana believes in the role of intellectuals as agents of change and spearheads of their country's development. Her commitment is not so much to any particular ideology or merely to her own country but to humanity at large. She believes that all members of society have the ability to change the present social order if they are motivated to do so and that the responsibility of creating such a motivation lies upon the shoulders of the intellectuals.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Tunisia offers a fascinating combination of ancient and modern. **Rehab Saad** went sighseeing and talked to the minister of tourism about his country's tourist industry and plans for the future



Tunisia's elegant marina at Sousse is an important tourist attraction

Travels in Tunisia

Sandwiched between Algeria and Libya, neither of which is famed for its appeal to holidaymakers, Tunisia, with its modern Mediterranean resorts, picturesque villages and ancient Roman and Islamic sites, has made the most of its assets to develop a successful tourist industry.

Like Egypt, Tunisia is an Arab country with a Mediterranean coastline. But the differences between the two countries, regarding tourism promotion, are striking. Whereas Egypt's Mediterranean coast attracts mainly domestic visitors, Tunisia's holidaymakers are mostly foreigners.

For a glimpse of the traditional Tunisia, travel just 20km from Tunis, the capital, to Sidi Bou Said. The village is dominated by blue and white — bright white of the houses and souvenir shops lining the cobbled streets which wind uphill; mid-blue of the big old doors, gates and shutters. The hill of Sidi Bou Said was a beacon for early navigators. Today, visitors can enjoy an unencumbered view over the Mediterranean from outdoor cafes serving soft drinks and mint tea, and the village has become a haven for artists and writers.

Not far along the Mediterranean coast from Sidi Bou Said lies Carthage, a name resonating with myth and the sounds of ancient battles. Founded by the semi-mythical Dido, who, legend has it, burnt herself on a funeral pyre for the love of Aeneas, Carthage rose to prominence in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, becoming one of the most important axes in the ancient world and establishing control over much of the Mediterranean region. Vying with Rome for control of the region, the first Punic War, from 264-241AD, resulted in Carthage's loss of Sicily. Subsequently conquering much of Spain, Carthage fought the second Punic War, and was defeated by Rome, despite Hannibal's famous campaign. The third Punic War brought the final destruction of Carthage and the razing of the city. Julius Caesar rebuilt it as Rome's administrative capital in Africa, and it was to become a centre of arts and learning, particularly in Christianity, after Rome's conversion. It was later captured by the Vandals, recovered by the Byzantines and finally abandoned by the Arabs, who made Tunis their local capital in its stead.

Its ruins may not be as grand as Egypt's monuments at Luxor — and over the centuries the monuments have been continually pillaged to provide building materials — but the sense of the city's long and varied history is all pervasive.

From Mount Byrsa, Carthage's equivalent of the Acropolis, one can see the remains of these civilisations: a Punic quarter below the ruins of a Roman forum, a Christian basilica, and the museum where archaeological relics are preserved and exhibited. They cover three major periods: Phoenician, Romano-African and Arab-Islamic.

The Phoenician quarter dates from the third to second century BC. It includes a collection of houses carefully built on a regular grid pattern, and endowed with every convenience the technology of the age could provide, such as water tanks, drains, plastered walls and tiled floors.

Amongst the Roman ruins, the amphitheatre, once the scene of that most brutal facet of the Imperial life — the mass sport of watching gladiators hack each other to death — now resounds to the gentler and more humane sounds of theatrical and musical festivals, held every July and August. These festivals enrich Tunisia's cultural life and attract visitors from all over the world.

Tunis itself is a happy combination of the old and the new, with luxurious hotels, good road connections, modern transport facilities and conference halls with the latest equipment.

Any tour of the modern city begins on Tunis' main street, Avenue Habib Bourguiba. It runs from the edge of Lake Al-Bahira and extends almost to the entrance to the ancient city known as Bab Al-Bahr (sea gate).

The avenue is lined on both sides with exotic plants and trees. Birds sing in the trees, and the avenue is scented by florists' stalls. There are benches for people to relax, and kiosks selling soft drinks and snacks. The city centre museums, exhibition halls and art galleries reflect the capital's thriving cultural life, and the Central Market sells modern products.

Belverde Park is a place to escape from the busy streets. An oasis of calm away from the hustle and bustle of the city, the branches of the park's many trees entwine, providing welcome shade in the summer.

For antiquities lovers, Bardo Museum, located in a former 19th century Beylical Palace, and endowed with a splendid collection of mosaics, statues and jewellery, is an essential stop on the itinerary.

At the heart of the modern city lies a medieval town, "Tunis *medina*", a collection of closely packed alleys housing mosques, *souqs*, *zawias* (small mosques) and ornate arched doorways. Entering the *medina* is like entering another civilisation — detached not only from the modern capital, but from time itself. Built 13 centuries ago, its architectural style is a model of urban Arab civilisation in the Maghreb and as such it has been designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. It was here that Hassan Ibn No'man, conqueror of Byzantine Carthage, built a mosque named Zitouna (olive tree), the oldest in Tunis, and second oldest in Tunisia after Kairouan's mosque.

The old town is enclosed by ramparts, with gates leading to the outside. It was a self-sufficient world, with residential areas, palaces, cemeteries, mausoleums, *hammams* (public baths), *madrasas* (schools), bakehouses, storehouses, artisans' workshops, courts and gardens.

Perhaps its most picturesque quarter is the central complex of high vaulted *souqs*, each originally specialising in a single trade. The 13th century Souq Al-Ettara for example, was a perfume and herbs market, where henna and sundry herbs are still sold.

Other interesting areas include a 14th century *souq* specialising in clothing, the women's market, the silk *souq*. The Souq Al-Berka is also enticing, and considered the most interesting, despite its ugly past. Amidst the shop fronts stands the former slave market where women and children were once put up for auction.

There is, however, another side to Tunisia — a series of well-developed resort towns offering a high standard of modern facilities. Hammamat and Nabel, 60km from Tunis, are two such resorts. The road from Tunis to these towns is scenic, with hills rising up, green trees and outcrops of red rock.

Hammamat's exquisite beaches, around two bays, and its colourful gardens, have transformed this former fishing village into one of Tunisia's leading resorts. According to an official, all hotels, tourist villages and even private villas, have a sea view as a stipulation of building regulations.

Outside the hotels and their peaceful gardens, the town provides plenty of facilities for visitors. A big shopping centre sells modern and traditional clothes, food and drinks. There is a *taf-taf* (open-sided bus) for visitors to tour the city. For further entertainment, the Hammamat Centre provides theatrical performances for visitors. The town's principal landmark is its ancient tower, overlooking the sea from one side, and an orange and jasmine orchard from the other.

The nearby town of Nabel, its bazaars, shops, hotels and even cafes painted white, specialises in pottery. It was empty, but our driver assured us this was because it was out of season. "In summer, this place teems with visitors," he said. The pottery — plain and coloured, traditional and new — is everywhere. There is also a variety of silverware, leather products and coloured glass, which, interestingly enough, is imported from Khan Al-Khalili in Cairo. Friday is market day in Nabel, when kilims, carpets, craft work and agricultural products from the area are bought and sold by tourists and residents of the area.

Sousse, on Tunisia's east coast, is both a thriving city in its own right and a resort. Its beaches are renowned, and its old city contains Christian catacombs dating to 2nd and 5th centuries AD. There is also a museum with a collection of mosaics from the 1st to 6th centuries AD.

The ancient *souqs*, particularly Reba and Qaid, are fascinating. Carpets and pure wool blankets hang on the walls, and small items of furniture carved out of olive wood are for sale. Qubba, an Arab cafe, is a relaxing spot to rest weary feet and enjoy a cup of coffee after a tour of the *souq*.

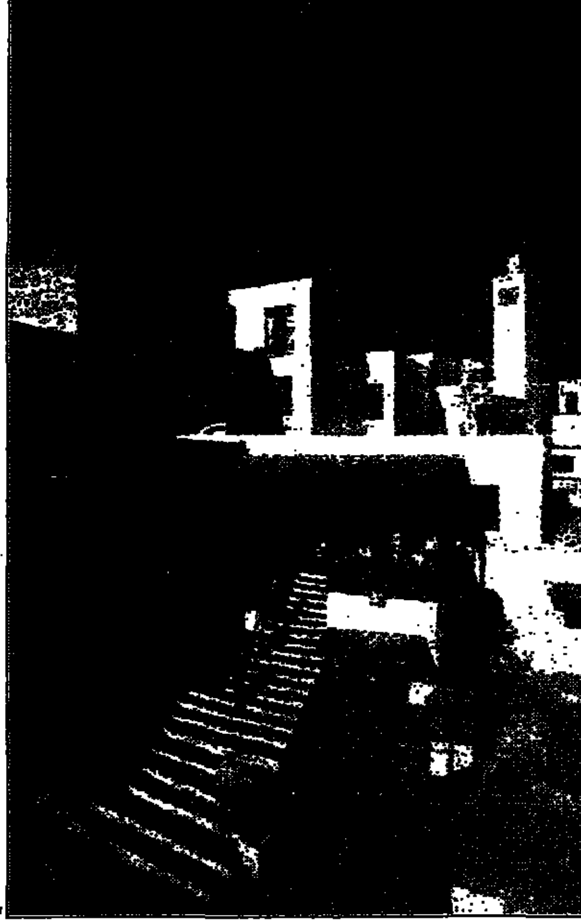
From Sousse it is easy to reach other destinations: Akouda, a village with beautiful small mosques and Roman ruins; Hergla, formerly Horraca Coeila, a clifftop village whose medieval buildings are dominated by the mausoleum of Sidi Bou Mendil, "the saint with a handkerchief", who was able, it is said, to transform a piece of ordinary cloth into a flying carpet to bear Him to the Holy Land of Arabia.

Kairouan, barely an hour by car from Sousse, is the site of what is claimed to be the first Muslim city in North Africa, and is arguably the most important Islamic city in the Maghreb. Its Grand Mosque dates from AD670.

Founded by Uqba Ibn Nafie, Kairouan, like Egypt's Fustat, was originally a campsite. Fustat, however, fell into disuse when the city of Cairo was developed. Kairaoun, on the other hand, was built of stone and survived. The architectural diversity and rich repertory of ornamental motifs of the Grand Mosque turn it into a museum of Islamic art and architecture. It has one of the world's best collections of ancient columns, and contains elements of numerous historical periods and places.

"The prayer hall has 17 gates made of cedar brought from Lebanon. The Graeco-Roman columns are brought from Carthage, Dogga and Jem," said Mustafa Manai, the *muezzin* (prayer caller), as we wandered through the prayer hall. "There is also a special compartment where the local ruler used to pray, built with wood brought from India." The *mihrab* seemed to shine. "It is covered with 32 ceramic tiles with metallic glints," said Mustafa, "and its pillars are made of amber containing petrified fish".

He looked back to an age when the mosque was a centre of Islamic theology for the whole region, and sheikhs would sit around the pillars surrounded by scholars.



Sidi Bou Said's blue and white buildings inspire artists



One of the many sidewalk cafes

Keep thinking!



Question 2: The tomb of the boy- king Tutankhamun was discovered on the west bank of the Nile by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon. Do you know the actual date of the discovery?

Do not forget to send the answers of the November quiz. Deadline is 15 December.

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
Answer to Question 1, issue 250
Answer to Question 2, issue 251
Answer to Question 3, issue 252
Answer to Question 4, issue 253

Post your entry to
Travel Quiz
Al-Ahram Weekly,
Al-Ahram,
9th Floor,
Sharia Al-Galaa,
Cairo.



Talking tourism

Tourism is big business in Tunisia. With four million visitors annually, the industry generates *about one billion three hundred million dollars* — around six per cent of the total national income. It is the nation's main source of hard currency, and employs around 250,000 people, according to Salaheddin Maaoui, Tunisia's minister of tourism. "So you can see we are depending on the industry for the development of our economy", he said.

Tunisia's tourist industry began as a government initiative back in the 1960s. However, it is now in the hands of the private sector. "The role of the government changed," explained Moawi. "Gradually it became responsible only for handing over land to investors. Then all investment responsibilities were handed over to the private sector. The government's role now is purely that of an observer."

The government keeps a particularly keen eye on the environmental consequences of tourist development. "The environment is our wealth", said Maaoui. "No tourist project can get a licence without fulfilling certain environmental requirements. If we expose our beaches to pollution we will be putting our tourist industry in danger." He added that there was a special government office to deal with the preservation of the coastline, and cooperation between the ministries of tourism and environment.

Cooperation, rather than competition, among Mediterranean countries was a key to future success, Maaoui stressed. "Around 160 million tourists come to the Mediterranean every year," he said. "As Mediterranean countries, we should be involved in joint projects to promote tourism on a regional scale". North African countries on the Mediterranean should work particularly closely, he believes.

"A tourist who goes to Egypt is looking for culture and antiquities. A tourist in Tunisia is generally looking for sun and sand. The two are complementary, and in the future we should be able to exchange experiences and set up a mechanism for cooperation between our two countries." He is hopeful that the newly established Middle East Mediterranean Tourism and Travel Association (MEMTTA) will provide such opportunities for regional promotion.

"Once the situation in Algeria becomes more stable and the sanctions on Libya are lifted, tourism in the whole region will be completely different," he added.

Tunisia's tourist market is mainly European. The vast majority of visitors travel in organised groups as package tourists, and Tunisian hotels and facilities are geared to this, Maaoui said. The Arab market is very different, and the Tunisian market would have to adapt to attract visitors from these countries. "With the Europeans we can sell our product a year or two in advance," he explained. "However, there is no such structure within the Arab market. Arabs tend to travel individually — there is no organised tourism as such; no travel agencies or tour operators are active in this market."

However, Tunisia is currently trying to encourage Arab investment in tourism. At present, only 20 per cent of tourist investment is in the hands of Arabs or foreigners, but Salaheddin maintains that the next few years will witness major Arab-Tunisian projects, particularly in the Hammamat area. "Prospective investors from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are already exploring the field", he said.

Salaheddin also hopes that visa restrictions between Arab countries will be lifted. Visitors from most European countries do not require a visa, a factor which encourages them to choose Tunisia as a holiday destination; similar freedom for Arab nationals could, he maintains, have the same beneficial effect. He cited Egypt as an example: "Currently we have about two to three thousand Egyptian visitors a year. If visa requirements were lifted, perhaps we would have a lot more."





Golden gloves

Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, Egypt's boxers beefed up their muscles and fought their way to gold medal number three. **Abeer Anwar** reports

In what proved to be a no holds barred battle of skill, strength and will, Egypt, for the third consecutive year, emerged as the victor in the 3rd International Boxing Championship. For the first time in the championship's three year history, a number of international boxing champions were in attendance, raising the stakes of the competition to world-class heights. In the tournament, which was held in the Zamalek Club from 2-7 December, Egypt earned 55 points through 6 gold medals, 3 silver and 7 bronze. Morocco came in second with 24 points and Tunisia was third with 22 points.

Despite the absence of under-51 kg contender Mustafa El-Quilini, the Egyptian and World Champion in his weight division, the matches were fast-paced and the bouts, skillfully fought. El-Quilini is the only boxer chosen by the Egyptian Olympic Committee to represent Egypt in the 1996 Olympics.

In one of the over-91 kg fights, heavyweights Ahmed El-Sayed of Egypt and Saudi Arabia's Youssef Haroun battled it out, each fighter landing a series of powerful blows before El-Sayed emerged triumphant, winning the match 4-1. El-Sayed was a *silver medalist* in the 1993 Mediterranean Games.

While the majority of the matches were intense, some bordered on the sadly comic. In the over-91 kg match between Youssef Haroun and Loai Da'bess of Egypt, Da'bess strutted into the ring full of confidence, while a throng of burly supporters chanted his name. But contrary to his personal trainer's advice, Da'bess intercepted one of Haroun's punches with his chin and was promptly knocked out. He was, incidentally, the only boxer to be knocked out.

The injection of European blood into the competition, left its mark on the quality of the matches. Mendy Christophe, France's 91 kg bronze medallist in the 1995 Berlin World Championship, was among the foreign champs competing in the tournament. Christophe squared off against Egypt's champion, Amr Mustafa, who took fifth place in 1995 World Championship, and proceeded to pummel Mustafa until the final bell, winning the match 6-2. After pounding on Mustafa, Christophe expressed his elation about this, his first visit to Egypt. "I insisted that I wanted to participate in this championship instead of the one held in Denmark every year. Egyptian boxers are very strong willed, skilled and fearless. In addition, the generosity and kindness shown me by the Egyptians has made me even more pleased with my stay here," he said. The country, apparently, left quite an impression on Christophe. "If I *don't turn professional in the US next year, I'll come back to Egypt,"* stated Christophe.

Syria's world champion, Mohamed Ben-Gesmia, a silver medallist in the Berlin World Championship and ranked number 2 in the world in the under-81 kg division, also found time outside the ring to extend his compliments to the host country. "I have really enjoyed competing against Egypt's boxers in this event," he said. "It was very well organised."



Egypt's Mahmoud Hassan (left) gets ready to deliver a right cross, only to find that his opponent has the same thing in mind

photo: Ayman Ibrahim

Hazy days in Heliopolis

In a classic case of sibling jealousy and rivalry, senior athletes in the Heliopolis Club feel alienated because of their junior counterparts. **Eric Asomugha** reports

The landscaping and buildings in the Heliopolis Club are almost as ritzy and chic as the majority of its members. Strolling along its tree-lined paths, or sitting in the shade enjoying one of the many culinary delights offered by the club's restaurant or the fast-food chains operating within its walls, members may feel that they are, to some extent, on top of the world. They did, after all, shell out $7,000 to join.

But in the realm of national sports, the club, and many of its senior athletes, are not smiling much nowadays. Traditionally, the club is noted for its gifted junior athletes, many of whom having earned several national titles. At the juniors level, Heliopolis has come out ahead in five of the eight regional tournaments for which it fielded a team this season. On the local scene, with the exception of croquet and billiards, the juniors have consistently excelled and placed the clubs a notch higher in the overall clubs' sports rankings. In short, speedball, tennis, swimming, water polo and squash teams and athletes managed to cut the mustard.

Hisham Hemeda, Heliopolis's tennis ace, who secured a double victory in both African and Egyptian tournaments, went on to make history by becoming the first Egyptian to win successive titles in the under-14, under-16 and under-18 age categories. The under-14 dynamic duo, Momtaz Atrebi and Mohamed Maamoun are expected to win the world tennis championship in Japan. These three young men made up the successful team which competed in African Tennis Federation tournaments in Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt and South Africa.

In addition, the explosive game of speedball, the brain child of Egypt, draws some of its strongest athletes from the Heliopolis Club, with many of them such as *Nabil and Amina Adel Imam, Mariam* Lutfi, Rania Eid, Mohamed Meguid and Samir Faris, securing national and international titles in various age categories. The water polo, swimming and synchronised swimming teams aren't exactly drowning, either. The club's water polo teams have won four first place and four second place finishes out of 13 junior league and international championships for different age groups.

Clearly, the club's claim to fame is due to the accomplishments of the juniors. "This season was quite good, with some excellent performances coming from the juniors," said Mohamed Riad, the club's sports director. "We place our emphasis on young athletes because it is on them that the future depends. With the support of their parents, we nurture their skills and help them achieve the kind of fame they would seek to find in the country's leading sports clubs."

These accomplishments, however, have materialised at the expense of the senior athletes, many of whom feel neglected. With what they perceive to be little encouragement, support or opportunities, many of these athletes have left for greener pastures.

This mass migration has taken its toll on the club. The football team is quickly *becoming an endangered species*, the volleyball team managed a painful fourth place in the last competition, handball lagged behind the competition in 11th place and basketball out-did the rest by finishing 16th. Martial artists, billiards players, and track and field competitors have had to struggle to retain their positions and standings.

Unfortunately for the seniors, and the club, the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better. And the club's officials have given no indication of changing their strategy. "The players are recruited from the ranks of the club's members," said Riad. "Outsiders are not recruited to play in the name of the club. They are welcome as temporary members, or can use the facilities for LE20 per day."

A man's job no more

While many women are eager to don the referee's striped shirt, some men feel that these ladies are getting too big for their britches. **Dalia El-Hennawy** writes

In the world of sports, it often seems that the battles hardest won are *those fought off the court or field.* At least this was the case for Rawya Youssef, a female referee in what many perceive to be a man's world.

"I've been a referee for 20 years, for no other reason than I love the job and sports," said Youssef. "This devotion was what kept me going, despite the hardships I faced as a female ref in Egypt." Youssef, who is certified as an international referee, is the only woman in Egypt with this certification, and one of a handful in this profession. As such, her conviction and determination is unwavering.

"No one can tell me that, after going abroad and paying for my own education to be accredited as an international referee, I am not as able as any man to referee a match," she said. "If they do, it's because they never believed a woman could do the job. My qualifications and achievements, however, speak for themselves."

Unfortunately, her achievements, when it comes to overcoming chauvinism and sexism, often fall on deaf ears. Skepticism among coaches and some players abounds with regards to a woman's ability to control a match. "There have been times when a coach would come up to me and ask if I was a referee," *Youssef recalled.* "They would then get this confused, embarrassed look on their face, apologise and stammer that they have never seen one before. But the biggest insult is when they ask if I am as able to intimidate the players in the same way male referees can. What can you say to someone like that?"

For Youssef and other female referees in Egypt, it is not about intimidating athletes, its about getting the respect and opportunities they feel they deserve. In general, when female referees are given the chance to referee, they only supervise women's matches. But, the rules of the game don't vary much between men's and women's matches, and, according to Youssef, do not play a role in the ability to do the job right.

"In comparison to many male referees, I am more qualified," she said. "This *doesn't mean that I am the best, but simply* that I am able to do the job. I don't see why men who have just graduated from secondary school or the faculty of physical education should be allowed to referee a match just because they are men."

The predicament, according to Youssef, is made more aggravating by the fact that some male referees referee only for the money. "I've met many male referees in Egypt who do it only for the money," stated Youssef. "They referee, for example, 10 matches per day, but I referee only 4-5 per week and pay the expenses out of my own pocket. It's all because of my addiction to the job."

Undaunted by the resentment and prejudice she faces, Youssef, is eager to advance her abilities. When not refereeing, and when she can find time away from her daily job, she travels abroad and observes men's and women's matches. She was, prior to becoming a referee, a member of the national volleyball team.

Her determination, and that of many women like her, has helped break through some of the discriminatory barriers both in Egypt and abroad. The International Football Federation has agreed to have female referees and four female supervisors participating in the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, and, if they prove themselves, in the *World Cup in France in 1998.*

While the battle of the sexes rages on in the form of the right to referee matches, Youssef has earned for herself the noted distinction of being certified the first female Egyptian international referee. But to break through the chains of chauvinism will require a concerted effort on the part of women, both in Egypt and abroad.

Advantage, everyone

LED BY Steffi Graf and Monica Seles, eight of the world's top 10 women's tennis players will compete in the $926,250 Toray Pan- Pacific Open Tennis Tournament starting in January. Graf, who is currently co-ranked as the world's *no. 1, along* with Monica Seles, will play in Japan for the first time in two years. The tournament will be held at Tokyo's Metropolitan Gym from January 30 to February 4. The winner will take $ 200,000.

Halfway around the world, Wimbeldon officials have decided to move up the deadline for ticket applications to 31 December. The deadline for the applications has traditionally been 31 January. The successful applicants are chosen in a public draw, the results of which will be announced in mid-February. The tournament starts 24 June and ends 7 July.

World Cup construction

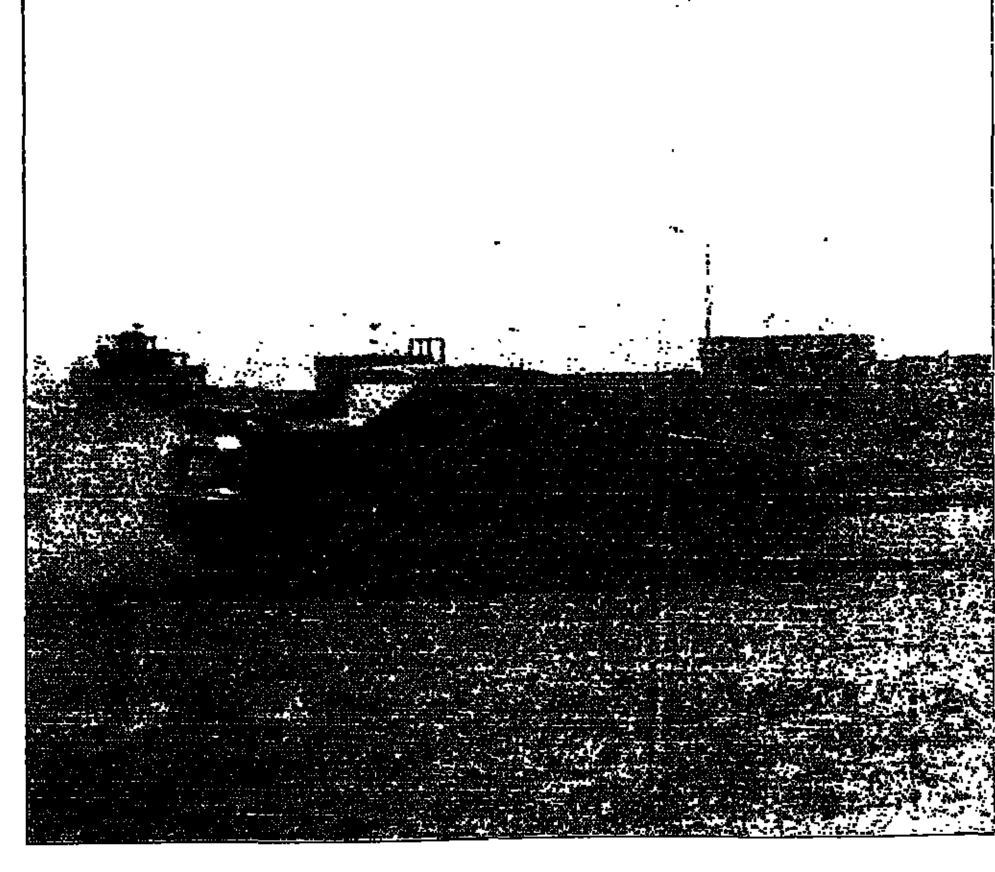
A NEW SUPER stadium, which is still under construction, that will host the final game of the 1998 World Cup soccer competition was named "Stade de France". The final game will be held 12 July in the *Stadium in* St. Denis, a working-class suburb of Paris. The name was selected from a list of entries from about 11,000 people who responded to a request by Prime Minister Alain Juppé in September, when he laid the cornerstone for what will be France's biggest stadium.

Bad boy

MANCHESTER United's controversial star Eric Cantona has been voted the most hated person in soccer. The French striker topped a poll among 90 fanzine editors conducted in the month's issue of the soccer magazine, *Four-Four-Two.*

Fisticuffs

WORLD Featherweight Champion Nassim Hamed is being lined up for a shot at Wayne McCullough's bantamweight *title next* March. McCullough, who now lives in Las Vegas, and England's "Prince" Hamed may find themselves slugging it out in Las Vegas on the Tyson-Bruno WBC heavyweight title bout on 16 March.





Burning rubber

With the pedal to the metal, Nasser Abu-Heif (above right) steered his Lancia Delta to victory, for the second consecutive year, in the last round of the Auto Cross, writes **Eman Abdel-Moeti**. For Abu-Heif, the win was another notch in his gear stick, but for the race organisers, this year's competition was a substantial step forward in internationalising the race.

"If all of the racers competed with the same type of car," said Abu-Heif, "then it would be purely a test of driving skill." But the organisers introduced several changes to the race, not the least of which was the new name and course. For the first four of the race's six year history, it was known as the Crazy Car Race, and was comprised of four rounds-a-year. But last year, the organisers designed a more complex course, modelled around those found in Germany and changed the name to the Egyptian Car Race. The final name change came in conjunction with staging the race under the auspices of the Egyptian Automobile Club, and was designed to be a tangible step to drawing international race car drivers to the tournament next year.

"This year, we made the 1.5 km track more challenging, placing this race in compliance with the speed test race category set by the Federation Internationale D' Automobile (FIA)," said Mohamed El-Sawy, the race's chief organiser. If all goes according to plan, next year's Auto Cross could well attract the kind and calibre of drivers that will place Egypt on the international auto racing map.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Finland's Independence Day FINLAND EGYPT

Finland supports the Egyptian role under the leadership of President Hosni Mubarak to realise peace in the Middle East and to safeguard Arab interests

Boosting Egyptian-Finnish ties

EGYPT and Finland have strong commercial and cultural ties which go back a number of centuries. Egyptian travellers described Finland, its geography, manners and the customs of its people in books detailing their journeys. Likewise, the ancient Turku University has an Arabic language department. Finnish explorers have visited Egypt since the middle of the last century and have written about it and its history.

Diplomatic relations in accordance with international law began between the two countries in 1947 and continue to blossom to this day.

1995 was considered a watershed in the political history of Finland, when it joined the European Assembly in January of the same year. Since then, Finland has been an active participant in the activities of the European Assembly, following a balanced policy in its relations with its neighbours, including Russia and the former Soviet republics and eastern Europe, encouraging them to take peaceful steps towards democracy, respect for human rights, and free market economies. Likewise, Finnish policy is concerned with the nations of the Mediterranean, for Finland considers security and peace to its south a natural strategic necessity for European security. Finland's foreign policy is reflected in the activities of a number of conferences and meetings held in Helsinki during 1995, among the most important being:

- The Nordic Countries' Conference of the United Nations for Peace and Development, held on 10-12 January 1995, and inaugurated by Dr Butros Ghali, secretary-general of the United Nations.

- A conference for a multilateral disarmament group within the Middle East, which was held 29 May-1 June 1995.

- A conference on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Helsinki Treaty, 1 August 1995. The original signing in 1975 was attended by many world leaders, among them American President Gerald Ford.

- The 24th Conference of the International Federation of Training and Development (IFTDO). During this meeting, Dr Helmi Sallam was elected to head the conference. Next year's conference will be held in Egypt, 4-7 February 1996, under the auspices of the Egyptian government.

The domestic affairs of Finland has seen free and democratic elections in which the opposition Socialist-Democratic Party won the majority of votes and formed a new interim government, thus transferring the moderate party which won the majority of votes in the previous election, to that of the opposition.

Compiled by: Mohamed Seif El-Yazl

Bilateral relations between Egypt and Finland are deeply-rooted and diverse. In the political field, Finland has closely observed the origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and since 1957, has participated in peace operations in the region. Finland also supports the leading role which Egypt has taken under the leadership of President Hosni Mubarak to attain peace in the Middle East along different paths, as well as mending inter-Arab rifts and realising Arab interests, in basic political and social security, democracy, respect for human rights and increased economic growth. Finland also supports Egypt's policy in all foreign affairs, such as the election of Egypt to a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for 1996-1997.

With regards to the economic and commercial field, exhibitions are being held in Finland to display unusual and excellent Egyptian products, such as hand-made carpets, furniture and agricultural products.

As for cultural, technical and scientific ties between the two countries, large-scale activities took place as reflected by the Egyptian delegations to Finland, among the most important being:

- A high-level delegation from the Ministry of Interior to study the latest means of producing identity cards.

- A delegation comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Tourism, EgyptAir and tourist companies, who participated in the Finnish tourism conference MATKA, held in January 1995.

- A delegation of Egyptian university deans and professors to research and study potentials for developing scientific and cultural cooperation between Egypt and Finland.

- A large number of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Egyptian universities attended a conference in Finland to study means of cooperation between the two countries regarding agriculture and agricultural products.

- A number of commissioners from the Ministry of Justice and Law visited Finland to research the legislative system there.

- A large group of top-ranked youths and athletes visited Finland for two weeks to present an artistic and cultural exhibition in a number of Finnish provinces.

There are a small number of those residing in Finland with Egyptian origins, who work within a wide range of fields, from university professors, doctors, engineers, to businessmen. They try to instill a sense of their Egyptian heritage in their children. These families frequently visit Egypt. This plays a great part in raising commercial and cultural relations between the two countries.

Lutfi Yaqoub
Egyptian ambassador in Finland

Congratulations to the government and people of Finland on the occasion of the 78th anniversary of the country's independence



Martti Ahtisarri, president of the Republic of Finland

- Born 23 June 1937/ Married.
- Secretary, Bureau of Development Co-operation, Ministry for Foreign affairs 1965-1971; Head of Section 1971-1972.
- Deputy Director, Department for International Development Co-operation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1972-1973.
- Ambassador to the United Republic of Tanzania, also accredited to Zambia, Somalia and Mozambique 1973-1977.
- United Nations Commissioner for Nambia 1977-1981.
- Special Representative of the Secretary-General for nambia, 1978-1986.
- Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development Co-operation, Ministry for Foreign Affairsn 1985-1986.
- Secretary of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs since 1991.
- Chairman of the Bosnia Hercegovina Working Group of the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia 1992-1993.
- Special Advisor to the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia in 1993.
- President of the Republic of Finland 1 March 1994-present.

A long history of relations

EGYPT and Finland are geographically separated by a great distance as Finland lies at the very north of Europe while Egypt lies at the north of the African continent. In spite of the distance, close ties were forged, particularly after Finland joined the EU and expressed its interest in boosting ties with Egypt after the Barcelona agreement due to be implemented in the year 2010.

Historically speaking, the beginning of Finnish-Arab ties were initiated by Ibn Fadlan's exploration journey to Finland from which he provided us with an accurate description of life there. Likewise Finnish explorer George August (1811-1852) paid a visit to Egypt and the Arabian peninsula in the 19th century. He converted to Islam and wrote several works on his travels which aroused the curiosity of other Finnish writers. At an earlier time, interest in the Arab world was only limited to Finnish universities which, since 1640, taught their students the Arabic language and literature. As a matter of fact, all schools in Finland now teach their students aspects of Egyptian civilisation during the Pharaonic period.

In the modern age, Egyptian-Finnish ties date back to 1947. Finland has always been keen to boost the economic and social development policies in Egypt. The Finland International Aid Agency provides US$19mn annually for electricity, food, agriculture, sanitation, waste-water treatment and sewage projects. In fact, the first hospital established in the Sinai after its liberation in 1987 was Finnish, based in Dier Al-Abd in north Sinai.

It is worth noting that Egypt is considered the major trade partner with Finland from the Arab world.



Garth Castren
Finnish ambassador in Cairo

Finland was a key contributor to the UN peace-keeping force during the Suez crisis of 1956. This opened the door for further dispatches of Finnish peace-keeping forces in various parts of the Middle East, such as south Lebanon. Finland is fully supportive of the current peace process and the pivotal role undertaken by Egypt's president since the Madrid peace conference in 1992. In appreciation of Egypt's stabilising role, Finland was among the first countries to write off Egypt's debts in 1990.

Nino Lincoln Timber: The competitive edge

NINO Lincoln is a leading supplier of forest products to Africa. It has been supplying the Egyptian market, as the first Finnish company, with quality timber. Goka Matiola, managing director of Nino Lincoln, stated that since the company began exporting Finnish timber to Egypt, the company's products have proved to be of outstanding quality. The company's activities witnessed such remarkable growth that it now supplies clients with quality timber from the United States, Canada, Russia and Sweden.

The company's products are widely praised by importers. This is can be attributed to the latest technology that Nino Lincoln has adopted.

Power technology from IVO Group

IVO GROUP is comprised of different companies which all operate in the area of power technology, particularly in turn-key projects and maintainance service. IVO International Ltd is responsible for undertaking the engineering operations of the group as well as in turnkey projects. IVO Group undertakes most of the power-related activities including designs and consultations. According to Sune Norrbäck, vice-executive president of IVO International Ltd, who is also chairman of the Finnish-Arab Trade Association, IVO staffs 1400 workers.



Sune Norrbäck

The group's projects are operating in more than 50 countries worldwide.

IVO International began its activities in 1960. Egypt is one of many countries which had many electrical projects implemented.

The first project of IVO was the Maziad power station 220/33kv. The second turnkey project was the power transmission station in Abu Dhabi in Zaid City SF6 132/11kv in 1992.

IVO has also been contracted to construct power facilities in Sheikh Zaid City. IVO was chosen because of its wealth of expertise and competitive prices.

Together with ABB Co, IVO is establishing two control centres. IVO is in the process of installing air conditioners in all branch stations.

IVO is currently manufacturing 17km-long electrical cables.



Finland's Independence Day FINLAND EGYPT

Egico

A pioneering company in Finnish wood export to Egypt

Exports in 1995 have increased by 200 thousand cubic metres

IN THE Finnish capital of Helsinki, among the success stories of Egyptians which we are greatly proud of, Hussein Maher, chairman of the board of Egico for Wood Export and Fathi Khedr, general manager of the company, both members of the Egyptian Embassy, are among those whose names ring forth. Maher, son of the late writer Mohamed Ali Maher, emigrated to Finland in 1974, and Khedr, who emigrated to Finland in 1972 and worked as a consulting engineer, founded Egico in 1986. In their offices in the capital of Helsinki, crowded with both Finnish and Egyptian workers, I met with Hussein Maher. He spoke of the activities of the company, saying: "The volume of the company's work alone tells you of its capabilities and potential in the field of importing, exporting and investing." This fame is not only known solely in Egypt. Rather, its fame in the business of exporting Finnish wood has brought it a good reputation in number of Middle Eastern countries and beyond, including Turkey and Japan. This is because Finnish wood is famous the world over for its quality, strength and excellence. This wood has enjoyed great success among Egyptian importers.

You and Fathi Khedr are an example for struggling Egyptian youths who should dedicate themselves to a trade and apply themselves vigorously towards success. You are among the most prominent Egyptians in Helsinki. Can you shed light on the company and its activities?


Hussein Maher and Fathi Khedr in their office in Helsinki

Import and export are the company's *main activity, primarily in the export of all* kinds of Finnish wood, which was the starting point for the activities which followed.

What kinds of Finnish woods do you export?

All kinds of wood for which Finland has *become renowned for. It is well-known* that Finland is the largest producing country of natural wood, having unique features not found in any other woods. We have red wood, white wood, birch logs, plywood and other compressed wood, and railroad ties.

Discussing wood products naturally leads to discussing paper production. Is this in your sphere of activities?

The prospect of paper-making is of interest *to us and cannot be ignored.* We are currently giving special consideration to this kind of activity.

Do you have any other branches in Egypt?

Alexandria is the company's second headquarters, for it has great commercial value. When we set up an office there, we appointed Gaber Thabit as its *general manager.*

I understand that you are head of another company, Mafa. What are its activities?

Mafa is a company completely independent from Egico. It is involved with exporting cartons, all kinds and sizes of *machines and materials for construction.* It also exports printing equipment to a number of countries, including Egypt, as well as Africa and some South American countries. Likewise, in the Egyptian market, it exports safety equipment and lifting equipment made in Scandinavia. In addition, we are involved in selling cars of all kinds. The company's volume of exports has reached 18 million Finnish marks.

Do you have any foreign branches?

We have *a branch in Latvia and another* in Russia. The company has appointed Ahmed El-Tuhami as general manager of these branches. El-Tuhami is among those Egyptians who traveled to Sweden and obtained Swedish citizenship, then set up a number of business projects before joining Egico, whereupon it was decided that branches should be set up in other countries.

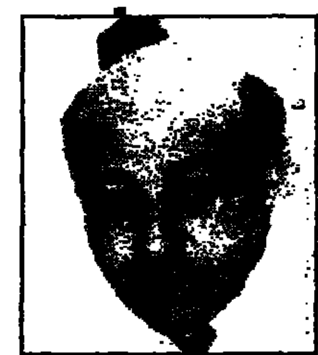
Fathi Khedr added: "We are Egyptians, and like Egyptians, our money and ambi*tions know no bounds. In spite of our liv*ing in Finland, Egypt is our mother country, and we are obliged to provide it with all its needs. Likewise, we import from Egypt all that we can."

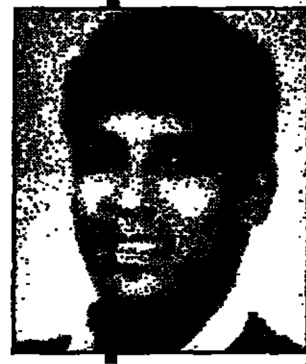
The presence of Hussein Maher and Fathi Khedr for 22 years in Finland and *their successful work is due to the facil*ities which the different Finnish agencies have provided them with, and the nature of the Finns who cooperate with Egyptians to improve and increase relations between the two countries in many different fields.

The Egyptian expatriate community in Finland is small in number, but it enjoys a fine reputation among other foreign communities, whose individuals are committed to and respect the laws of the country.

The Egyptian Embassy in Helsinki, headed by Ambassador Lutfi Yaqoub, extends all facilities and consular services to assist Egyptians residing in Finland with developments in their homeland.


Hussein Maher
Chairman of the board

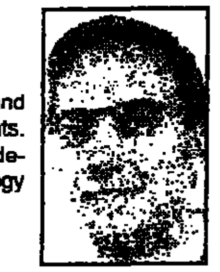

Fathi Khedr
General manager


Ahmed El-Tuhami
Manager of the Latvian and Russian branches

Finland's Independence Day FINLAND EGYPT

Many facets of Egyptian-Finnish cooperation

Bright examples of expatriates in Finland



SAID Sadeq, public relations manager and expert in economic and social developments. He has obtained a number of university degrees in Middle Eastern studies, sociology and political relations.

Profile of an Egyptian in Helsinki



WAFIQ Eid is one of the notable Egyptians residing is Helsinki. He emigrated to Finland 20 years ago and worked in a number of positions. Now he works as an independent businessman, and has three brothers who also emigrated to Finland.

A fruitful relationship



Martin Björnstrom
Trade commissioner

TRADE is considered an important part of the relations between Egypt and Finland, and is a natural means of mutual contact and exchange. On the occasion of the 78th anniversary of Finland's independence, it can be said proudly that Finland, since the thirties, has enjoyed strong commercial representation in Egypt. Finland is fortunate to have developed its industry in an amazingly fast period in the wake of World War II. Its companies' products are made with the highest standards of quality afforded by human and technological abilities, and are comparable to those of different countries of the world.

Finland relies on its natural resources, such as wood and wood-related products, and exports large amounts to Egypt. Generally speaking, the commercial balance between the two countries is tilted in favour of Finland. The value of Finnish exports to Egypt reached nearly US$150mn in 1994, which includes different kinds of construction lumber making up nearly half of Finland's exports to Egypt.

Lumber, imported from Finland, is used in numerous fields, including the construction of Egyptian high-rises. Other Finnish exports to Egypt include paper and paper products, such as cardboard, which make up approximately a fourth of Finland's exports to Egypt. These products are usually in the form of newsprint and paper for office and school use. Cardboard products come in the form of different kinds of shipping containers and for other uses.

Other important Finnish products for export include electrical components such as high-strength cables. Export of this product started in 1975, as hundreds of Egyptian villages were provided with electricity using Finnish electrical cables and wire. It is projects like these which help increase the standards of living of the Egyptian people.

It is of interest to mention that Finland also exports other different materials and dairy products.

In addition to what has been mentioned in the above, it is possible to show examples of cooperation in numerous other fields such as construction and water supply and treatment.

As for Egyptian exports to Finland, it includes foodstuffs and cotton products. Foodstuffs, such as fruits and vegetables, are met with great enthusiasm in Finland, because of its location in the north, far from Europe, which cannot compete with Egypt in agricultural growth. Cotton product exports to Finland include thread, fabric and clothing accessories.

There clearly lies an increased demand for commercial exchange between Egypt and Finland. Both countries are working together to consolidate this demand and remove any difficulties which may arise. There are always new fields which can be capitalised on; new opportunities which will appear on the horizon and bring benefits to both countries. Finland and Egypt will continue working together to develop increased business and commercial relations.

Water project benefits

Seppo Lehtinen
Director of foreign operations

IN 10TH of Ramadan City, services provided by a water treatment project continue to grow. This project, created between 1991 and 1993 under Finnish-Egyptian cooperation, began operations in October 1993. The rewards and benefits of such a project were felt immediately upon implementation.

The electrical mechanics were done with the help of Finnish contractors, while the civil work was done by Egyptian contractors. The Finnish agency FINNIDA was responsible for financing the electrical mechanics and implementing the technical advising in regards to design with the planning and managerial contracts in addition to supervisory work. Assistant technical consultations were done by the Finnish company Vesi-Hydro, engineering design work done by Darwish Co. for Engineering Consultations in Cairo.

The project aims at improving the standards of living in the Wadi Al-Nil area, by increasing the inhabitants' supply of fresh drinking water for household use, in addition to pumping stations for agricultural and industrial use within new community associations such as Badr at 10th of Ramadan City located 50km northeast of Cairo. The project has provided services to approximately 250,000 residents, and is expected to serve another 150,000 residents. The project will expand its operations by increasing the power of these stations from 800 to 2400 litres per second, as well as building new filter stations and pumps to redirect and rechannel the water.

Vesi-Hydro was founded in 1959, and is a private independent company specialising in engineering consultancy. It offers infrastructural consulting services in addition to consultancy for environmental projects, and special engineering projects such as roads and soil mechanics, for the company has vast expertise within these specialised fields. The foreign activities of the company are centred in East Africa and the Middle East. The company's major aim is to provide foreign countries consultation and contracting within its sphere of operations and to strengthen cooperation with other organisations and companies.

Implementing the project was the fruitful result of cooperation between Egypt and Finland, whose efforts were initiated by the manager for the New Communities Association, and likewise the work group which worked with him, and the supervising unit of the New Communities Association Organisation.

How do you get to Finland?

BY AIR: travel directly from any major capital in the world to the Helsinki Fanta International Airport, or to the cities of Tampere or Turku.

By boat: directly from Germany or Sweden to Helsinki, Turku or Naantali.

Passport: All travellers to Finland must have a valid passport. A visa is required by all, except for nationals of Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Visas: To obtain an entry visa, go to the nearest Finnish Consulate. In Cairo, the consulate is located 3 Abul-Feda Street, Zamalek, and is open from 9-12am except for Fridays and Saturdays.

Weights and measurements: Finland uses the metric system, with weights measured in kilogrammes and grammes; distances are measured by kilometres and metres and volumes by litres.



Downtown Helsinki

Electrical current: Household electricity uses 220 volts.

Staying in Finland: It is advisable to book a hotel reservation prior to arrival. It is possible, however, to reserve a hotel from the Hotel Booking Centre near the Helsinki Railway Station, which is open from the following times:

From 16 May to 15 September: During the week 9.00am to 9.00pm. Saturdays from 9.00am to 7.00pm. Sundays from 10.00am to 6.00pm.

From 16 September to 15 May: During the week from 9.00am to 6.00pm. Closed Saturdays and Sundays.

Hotel Reservation Office
3 Asema Street
Aukio 00100
Tel. 358-0-171133
Telex: 125413

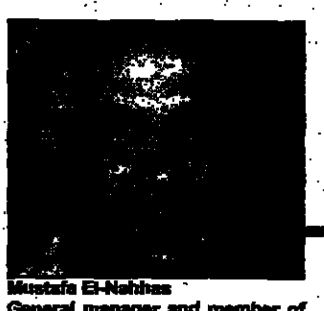




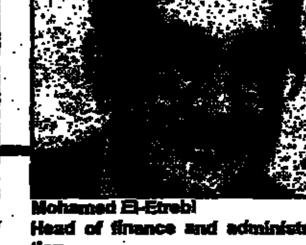
هكذا من الأصل

Finland's Independence Day — FINLAND — EGYPT

Marryat and Scott: Moving up in the field of elevators



Mustafa El-Nahhas
General manager and member of the board

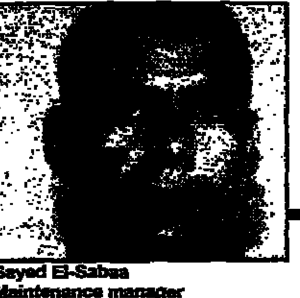


Mohamed El-Etrebi
Head of finance and administration

Osama El-Khuli
Factory manager



Mustafa El-Sisi
Installation manager



Sayed El-Sabaa
Maintenance manager

Grant Wadie
Sales manager

MARRYAT and Scott Egypt for Elevators is an Egyptian shareholding company, as per the Investment Law, with an Egyptian-Finnish capital shared between Raco for Investment and Development and Kone Finland Worldwide. The company started in 1978 by importing parts and components, and in 1983, a factory for producing elevator cabins and doors was built on the Cairo-Alexandria Road on an area of 5 feddans. Since then, the company has developed ten-fold, and has worked to expand its operations. Recent developments with a cost of over LE2.5mn are expected to be completed this month and will include:

— A new production warehouse and showroom.

— Computerised drilling machines.

— Use of electrostatic dry powder paint.

— Producing and assembling electrolytes.

This is in addition to the production of fire-resistant doors of the highest standards in the world. US laboratory test results have shown that these doors can resist fire for 90 minutes. Maryyat and Scott fire doors can be found in some of the most important projects in Egypt, such as the administration building of Enpi Petroleum, the Forte Grande Hotel at the Pyramids, the power stations in west Cairo and Al-Arish and the tourist village Sheikh Coast in Sharm Al-Sheikh.

As for sales of new elevators, the Egyptian market has placed its trust in the company over the span of the previous years, owing to the quality of the elevators and the commitment which the company shows towards them. Sales rose during 1995, especially those using advanced technology by changing voltage to control the speed, and those using computers. Within this framework, contracts were signed with EgyptAir to provide 14 elevators for its corporate offices in Heliopolis. Likewise, a contract was signed with Arab Contractors (Ahmed Osman and Co.) to provide them with 10 elevators for their administration building in Nasr City. The company also installed elevators for Belaym Petroleum, Roda Hospital, the Sports Medicine Hospital and Movenpick and Blue Sky hotels in Hurghada. A contract has also been completed with the Police Officers Residential Fund to provide and install elevators at the Police Towers in Agouza and Mohandessin.

These contracts which were completed last year prove the amount of trust the owners, companies and purchasers place in the abilities and commitment of the company, and it is a trust which it is hoped will continue to grow as newer developments in technology are constantly made in the field of elevators.



The present is here: replete with promise, possibility and paradox. But there are no celebrations or slogans: just ordinary, extraordinary life

Mohamed El-Bisatie: The world, as it is






Mohamed El-Bisatie's fiction has been variously acclaimed by critics of widely divergent schools: some have lauded him as a master realist, others as a representative of modernism, others yet as a practitioner of magical realism. As for El-Bisatie himself, he consistently refuses to confine his work, or any literary work for that matter, to pre-conceived categories. He is a member of no political party, he emphasises; nor does he ascribe to any school of thought.

But if El-Bisatie defies categorisation and eludes labels, it is not because he searches for an exotic individuality, but to retain an unblinkered gaze on the world, unshackled by ideology. El-Bisatie's perception of reality is singular: writing about ordinary people he discovers extraordinary abilities and dreams, and uncovers great complexity. His six collections of short stories and five novels attest to the intricate relationship between art and lived experience. His work does not place art outside reality, or in opposition to it as an idealised alternative. Nor does he consider that art imitates life. El-Bisatie's writing presents an assessment of reality, throwing into relief the multiplicity of its layers. His texts place at the centre the apparently ephemeral and marginal, sounding out their hidden significance, never hammering in a message but relying on the explicit to yield the implicit. Although he favours certain locales, his works are not provincial. Political and moral lessons are alien to the Bisatie oeuvre, which investigates the deeper levels of the present moment, discarding all preconceptions and searching out the essential embedded within the commonplace. His innovation lies in the technical devices he employs to render life in a condensed and sublimated form.

El-Bisatie has devoted minimal time to reading philosophy, politics or critical theory. It is the concrete and the tangible that fascinate him. He sees the world as a narrative with characters in situations, a gallery of sketches of experiences — his vision of the world is derived from the genre with which he is impassioned. He devours fiction — Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, primarily; then Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner and Fitzgerald, as well as Sartre and Malraux. But it is particularly Flaubert and Camus who exerted a marked influence. From Flaubert, whom he idolises, he has assimilated and emulated the apparently impartial, almost journalistic narrative mode. From Camus, he acquired not the existentialist outlook but the sparsity, the elimination of all sentimentality. El-Bisatie does not favour much interior monologue or stream-of-consciousness.

His stance vis-à-vis heritage is likewise very singular. Few would dare confess to the choices he has made. He selects only those works that have survived and persisted, in other words the contemporaneous. Of canonised texts he has read little — the *Thousand and One Nights*, fables such as Aesop's and *Kalila Wa Dimna*, the great Arab poet Al-Mutanabbi. He has taken little interest in Islamic mysticism, and of Arab historians it is only Al-Jabarti who arrested his attention. El-Bisatie is a novelist who immerses himself in the present and in the eminent — the moment replete with promise, possibility and paradox.

Of modern and contemporary Arab authors, El-Bisatie read Naguib Mahfouz, Yehia Haqqi, Youssef Idris and Zakaria Tamer. Back in the sixties he sought to meet some of these authors. He attended Naguib Mahfouz's weekly gatherings at the Safia Helmi Casino, where he chose to be a silent observer. He also went to the premises of *Al-Katib* magazine to meet Youssef Idris who treated him, he recalls, as a country bumpkin out to see the edifices of the capital.

There is one label El-Bisatie does not reject: he belongs to "the generation of the sixties", alongside Abdel-Rahman El-Abnoudi, Amal Donqol, Ibrahim Aslan, Bahaa Taher, Yehia El-Taher Abdullah, Gamal El-Ghitani, Gamil Attia Ibrahim, among others. It is a label that, though it encompasses individual voices and trends, has common features. It was a generation that did not belong to the traditional right- or left-wing, but had an ambivalent attitude towards the Nasserist regime, accepting a few things and rejecting much — not least the headlines of newspapers and the official proclamations. It thus bore the responsibility of providing an alternative narrative to the official one — hence the reliance on direct experience, personal insight and private sources. The contribution of El-Bisatie and his contemporaries was this pursuit of a truth untouched by distortions, the attempt to unmask the face of reality and bear witness to the world as it is. El-Bisatie thus vested his faith in the narrative of simple events, unadulterated by commentary, believing that concrete details in their correlations will yield infallible generalisations. His project is to reach the heart of things, the constituent elements and essential relations that compose the human condition.

El-Bisatie is one of the few writers who inhabit their artistic vision, which in his case is drawn from his own experience and parallel to it. He cannot be said to be a professional writer, for writing is not his source of income. El-Bisatie has worked for many years as an inspector-general at the Central Agency for Auditing. But if writing is not his livelihood, it is his way of breathing. He writes from lived experience, the insights in his work drawn from his personal anguish and duress. History, to him, is what he witnesses at work, every day. His village, Al-Gammalia, in the governorate of Daqahlila, separated from Port Said by Lake Manzala, is the setting for many of his short stories and some of his novels.

One of his earliest memories is of the day of his father's funeral, when El-Bisatie was 10. Ever since the abrogation of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, in 1951, a popular militia would set out from the village, cross Lake Manzala, and attack the British camps at the canal zone. Soon after the 1952 army takeover, and on the day of the funeral, a line of soldiers arrived on horseback, bearing the new flag and trailing a cannon on wheels, ordering the militia men, who were sitting at the café peeling oranges, to drop their weapons. The officer giving commands was using a microphone. The army confiscated the weapons and arrested the militia men — the revolution was not going to allow a state within a state. The 10-year-old, returning from his father's funeral, watched the men carted being off on a train carriage otherwise used to transport cattle. The scene engraved itself on his mind, revealing to him in its smallest details, the end of an era, and the beginning of a new one.

As school pupils, El-Bisatie and his classmates were often ordered to go out in line in the scouts' uniform on the many celebrations related to the revolution. Politics, then, was a matter of celebrations, ceremonies and costume dramas. Whenever an important guest from the ruling (and only) party came to visit and deliver a speech, it was essential that the pupils stand in line at the train station and run, breathless, after the carriage, shouting slogans. The visitor would be the guest of honour at the house of local notables and after a rich lunch and siesta, would stand and deliver an off-the-cuff but probably much-rehearsed speech, gesticulating with his pistol. The pupils then would repeat the show at the train station for the departing guest. The pattern was to continue through secondary school — politics as a theatrical show, where the role of the populace was that of the audience contributing by dressing for the occasion and applauding according to stage directions.

El-Bisatie's move to Cairo, to join the Faculty of Commerce, coincided with the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, and the 1956 Suez War. Here, too, he was assigned a symbolic role in the game of war, in the outer rituals of a military training unit for civilians. This entailed dressing in an impressive yellow uniform and shouldering a well-oiled Russian gun. The students were very young, leaving the camp for the cinema where, at the door, exhibiting their weapons, they would be exempted from buying tickets. They were elated with a sense of themselves as the canal's potential liberators — an elation that did not abate even when they noted that their training was of no consequence, revolving as it did around the parts of a gun. Naturally, none of them ever made it to the canal. El-Bisatie's share in politics and combat was never to exceed that of enactment, pantomime-like, with no true influence on the course of events, not even vestigial. Soon, he was to discover that the vast majority of Egyptians had likewise been assigned the same role — neither participating in any decision-making nor allowed to contest it.

But within the orbit of his own family, El-Bisatie was the prime decision-maker. In his second year at university he was obliged to drop out temporarily in order to support his family through a string of jobs that afforded him tutelage of a very different nature. He held a clerical job for a while at Gattegno which at the time was still owned by foreigners. The Egyptian manager treated him execrably, prompting El-Bisatie to reflect on the division into oppressor and oppressed within a nation struggling for independence. Later he took a job in the auditing department of the Ministry of Finance in Sohag. He sent his basic salary to his family, living on his bonus. The room where he lodged was tiny and suffocating, but it was there that he made his first attempts at writing, sustained by the memory of many Gorky short stories depicting characters living under similar circumstances. The situation in Egypt at the time — the detentions, the silencing of free opinion — was in stark contradiction with all the slogans of the literature produced by the establishment; none of those promises of radical change were ever fulfilled.

In Sohag, his mind turned to less high-flown, but far more real, realities. It was particularly the image of the first woman he knew that was to be reflected in many of his works — he gave her features to his female characters. This woman, the epitome of sensuality, was the alluring daughter of a drug dealer, a few years his senior, who was involved with many young men in the village. In his encounters with her at the cemetery he entered a mysterious, ambiguous world mingling sex and death, innocence and sin. This woman left eventually with her father for Port Said. Her shadow inhabits his work among the images of refugees, stolen embraces and women who cannot say no. The memory of another face, a classmate who was the subject of his platonic love in his first year at university, floated antithetically in his mind; El-Bisatie had been too destitute to ask her out and express his love for her, and thus the possibility was nipped in the bud.

Having managed to complete his studies he began to look for a job in Cairo, as well as a newspaper to publish his work; he found both. It was then that he started working for the Egyptian Central Agency for Auditing, where he still works. Through his work, El-Bisatie gained entry into the underworld of Egypt; one of his tasks was to inspect all the prisons, spending a month at a time in each. Thus he experienced first-hand the world of bondage and captivity, of oppression at its ugliest and most primitive, of the yearning for a mere whiff of freedom and a semblance of contact with human life. El-Bisatie's short stories on prison life chart the manifold, rough-textured facets of oppression. The eye of the "inspector" (and El-Bisatie has a very observant eye) registered the minutest discrepancies in the accounts which afforded glimpses into the inner workings of the institutions. His close observations of prisons and other institutions furnished the novelist with invaluable readings in Egyptian reality.

After El-Bisatie's appointment at the Egyptian Central Agency for Auditing he continued to support his family. It was some years before El-Bisatie got married to a psychiatrist and started a family of his own. Banished to the Gulf for financial reasons, he was totally incapacitated by the alien environment — much as an uprooted plant which will not take to the new soil. Throughout his five years in the Gulf, El-Bisatie did not write a single word, though he continued to read. His collection of short stories *Haza Ma Kaan* (That is What Was) was misconstrued as his shocked reaction to Egypt after the years of self-imposed exile: it was written before his sojourn abroad and published after his return. But only a few days after his return, El-Bisatie had started writing again. His artistic vision was, once again, in harmony with his life. He continues to explore plausible situations and characters with characteristic economy of style, employing a tempo and idiom akin to those of everyday life.

El-Bisatie is the father of three children; his daughter, the eldest, is an economist, and his two sons are students at the Faculty of Engineering. His family life, tranquil and conducive to writing, proved therapeutic to his previous emotional failures. It also leaves him time to frequent cafés to play chess and backgammon, his two favourite games.

Profile by **Ibrahim Fathi**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♦ Who better to tell me about an upcoming international conference than its co-ordinator, **Magda Metwalli**. The conference in question is Improving the Environment for the Urban Poor: Towards Sustainable Development. Co-organised by the Society for Upgrading the Built Environment (SUBE), of which **Magda** is secretary-general, and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (UNCHS) regional office for Arab Countries, the conference's aims are quite clear: to achieve improvements in the living environment of all people on a sustainable basis and promote the involvement of women in urban management by developing, discussing and advising on appropriate strategies. And what seems to me to be even clearer, dears, is the abundance of support received and the immense number of participants hoping to accomplish this aim. And as soon as possible, hopefully, for the conference is also being held as a prelude to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul next year. Held under the auspices of Egypt's first lady, **Suzanne Mubarak**, and with the renowned environmentalist **Mustafa Tolba** as its chairman, then this month's conference, held from 18-21 December, can really do nothing but succeed in its honest intentions.

♥ The renowned and stunning actress, life-long friend of mine **Nadia Lutfi**, recently called to tell me some wonderful news. It seems that she has finally decided to nominate herself in the upcoming Actors' Syndicate board elections at the end of the month. Competing with **Nadia** for the position of syndicate chairman will be actor **Abdel-Ghaffar Oda**, who formerly held the position and is currently under-secretary of the Ministry of Culture and head of the Centre for Folk and Performing Arts, as well as renowned actor, the multi-talented **Hamdi Ahmed**. All three stand a good chance of winning dears, but there's no doubt in my mind as to who'll be getting my vote when the time comes.

♦ When I heard that the renowned French singer of Algerian origin **Enrico Macias** was coming to Egypt, my ears immediately pricked up; the smile on my face grew even wider when I also heard that all the proceeds from his performance, organised by the Zamalek Rotary Club, would go to charity. Thousands of fans, including goreous actor **Omar El-Sherif**, French Ambassador **Patrick Leclerq** and his wife, and Minister of Electricity **Maher Abaza**, turned up in droves last week to hear **Enrico** warble the night away at the Semiramis. It came as a pleasant surprise to realise that **Enrico** actually remembered me — the last time we had met was seventeen years ago, during his first ever visit to Cairo as the guest of former president, **Anwar El-Sadat**. But I really shouldn't have been that astonished — people like **Enrico** and myself are hardly forgettable, are we really?

♥ Nothing was more delightful to me than going through my mail and finding an invitation to attend an opening at **Salwa El-Maghraby's** Khan El-Maghraby Gallery in Zamalek. And so last week, there I was, surrounded by artists and art-lovers, and chatting to my good friend **Leila Hafez** and the artist himself, **Adli Rizkallah**. In fact, his latest watercolours couldn't have found a better setting, with their soft tones blending in well with the gallery's warm, cozy atmosphere.

photo: Salah Omar



Smooth crooner at the Semiramis (left); Actress Nadia Lutfi (above)